



# THE PRESENT CONDITION OF INDIA

*A Study in Social Relationships*

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TO KAILASH

A STUDENT WHO DIED PREMATURELY OF MENINGITIS  
IN MAY, 1938

HE REPRESENTED THE INDIA THAT IS TO BE  
AND THOSE WHO WILL BUILD IT

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## FOREWORD

OF BOOKS ON INDIA there is no lack, and every season brings many additions to them. And yet it is sad to think how superficial and partial most of them are. I am often asked to recommend some books on India and, though I make some suggestions, I am keenly conscious of the poverty of the field of choice. The literature on modern India began in the nineteenth century with books written by Englishmen who had served in India. Inevitably they reflected the mentality of their class and treated India as an administrative problem. India was to them a land where viceroys and governors and district officials bravely functioned, and the hundreds of millions of Indians formed a distant, unpleasant and rather vague background to their activities. History was not understood or was distorted, current facts and conditions were ignored, everybody who disagreed with them was frowned upon and dubbed an agitator, and a legend of the white man's burden was built up.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, a few Indians took to the writing of books on India. Some excellent work was done, notably by Dadabhai Naoroji and Romesh Dutt, but later the growth of nationalism led to sentimental writing in praise of India's past and in condemnation of British rule. These influenced Indian opinion greatly and produced a healthy reaction against the feelings of inferiority and helplessness which the writings of British officials had produced. But most of these books were inadequate, one-sided and very limited in outlook.

During recent years a new kind of book has appeared, in

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which an attempt is made to consider objectively the problems of India, and her past background under British rule. India is no longer a picturesque country of bejewelled maharajahs, snakes, *shikar* and polo, but a land where vast forces are at play and hundreds of millions of people are astir. Powerful movements, with a novel technique of action, have developed, challenging, with considerable success, the foundations of British imperialism. Behind these movements lie the appalling poverty of the masses and the urge of the middle classes to find opportunities of growth. Conflicts arise within India between various classes, but the major conflict is of the Indian people with the imperialism that dominates and exploits them. That conflict continues, in spite of minor changes like provincial autonomy, and it will continue till India achieves her independence and the power to deal with her problems of poverty and unemployment.

The future of three hundred and seventy million human beings is important enough, but in the world of to-day this future is linked up with other world problems. A solution of these problems inevitably involves a solution of the Indian problem. They cannot be separated. For such a solution an intelligent appreciation of the problem is essential.

This book written by an Englishman who has spent many years in India in intimate contact with the masses, moving with them and yet detached in outlook, is valuable in giving us a glimpse of the real problem. Leonard Schiff has treated his subject, as it should be treated, as a problem of social relationships, and thus brought out many factors which we are otherwise apt to overlook. It is immaterial whether we agree or disagree with all his opinions or judgments. They are based on knowledge and an intimate study at close

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quarters of the Indian scene. They are obviously sincere attempts to find out the truth. As such they are worth while for all of us, and will help us to think straight and understand somewhat the significance of much that is happening in India.

JAWAHAR LAL NEHRU.

*October 23rd, 1938.*



## INTRODUCTION

THERE IS AN ENORMOUS literature on India which grows daily, and it is perhaps rash indeed to add to it. The writer feels that he would never have had the courage to do so, had he not been urged on by his friends.

Looking at some of the books on India, they seem to fall roughly into four categories. First of all, there are the essays in the picturesque and the sensational. These tend to exploit India's backwardness either for purposes of supplying a demand or to prove that India is not fit for self-government. Among these one may include the writings of Sir George MacMunn, Miss Mayo and the strange blend of Fascism and mysticism of Yeats-Brown.

Then there are the reporters; most of these are able to write interestingly, because they are trained observers. One may refer to the books of George Slocombe, Glorney Bolton and Margharita Barnes and the forthcoming book on Asia of John Gunther.

Thirdly there are the intelligent globe-trotters; I doubt whether it is possible to get any idea of the complexity of India in a cold-weather visit. Some hasty talks with kindly Nationalist leaders and a visit to an official bungalow are no equipment for pontificating on India. Mr. Basil Mathews has recently written such a book, which, despite its undoubtedly good intentions, betrays a meretricious style and a superficiality, inevitable under the given conditions. One of the best of such books was Halidé Edib's *Inside India*. This intelligent and cultured Turkish lady succeeded in getting beneath the skin a little and her book is valuable as a picture of some tendencies, especially in Muslim India, but its scope is limited. There are innumerable little



“missionary” books on India; none of which have much lasting value and their viewpoint is limited.<sup>1</sup>

Then there are the political and other experts. Of these there are so many that it would be invidious to pick any out for special mention. Books on Indian politics, economics and culture abound. Mr. Rawlinson’s *Short Cultural History of India* is valuable and I must acknowledge my debt to the books of Mr. Thompson and Mr. Garratt. I have referred to a number of books in the text. Many of these are Indian and probably unknown in England. They could be obtained from any good Indian bookshop, such as Kitabistan in Allahabad or Taraporewala in Bombay. I have been greatly helped by having had to read for the last four months as many as six papers daily, as well as periodicals. Of these may I mention the *Modern Review* of Calcutta, the Leftist *New Age* of Madras, and the Socialist weeklies, *Independent India* (organ of M. N. Roy), the *Congress Socialist* and the new Marxist weekly, *National Front*. *Harijan* provides a weekly pulpit for Mr. Gandhi and there are innumerable other weeklies and dailies in English, not to speak of vernaculars.

Besides books referred to in the text, I would add the attractive books on Rural Reconstruction by those excellent officials, Messrs. Brayne and Darling, *Behind Mud Walls*, by Wisner, *Indian Economics*, by Jetar and Beri, and the valuable series of pamphlets published by the Congress. There is an official history of the Congress by Dr. Sitaramaya, and the lives of the great nationalists and their writings have been published. Among Congress publications, I should refer to the comprehensive report on the Cawnpore Riots entitled *Hindu-Muslim Problem*.

I must acknowledge the assistance received from Mr.

<sup>1</sup> C. F. Andrews’s books are in a separate category. His *India and Britain* is well worth reading.

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Chudgar and other members of the Indian States Peoples Conference and the valuable advice given me in talks with innumerable Indian friends, who have disclosed their minds to me and shared their griefs. Many people have given me hospitality during this past year, and for this I am grateful also.

My equipment for writing is meagre, but I have had the opportunity of three very rich years in India from 1929-1932 and I returned to India in June, 1937. Besides travelling considerably from Ceylon to the Himalayas, I have had the interesting experience of staying for some months in Allahabad and seeing something of the work of the Congress Office. To my friends there I cannot be grateful enough and, if this book is critical in places, I trust that they will not feel that they have been ill-required.

I have tried to be objective. Passions are easily stirred in the controversial atmosphere of India, but the encouraging feature of the situation to-day is that political and racial disputes are giving place to an honest facing of the deplorable economic position of the great masses of the people, and it is on their behalf that this book has really been written. The unchanging East is changing with incredible rapidity and by the time this book is published some of its contents may already need revision.

It may be asked why a Christian priest, albeit a somewhat unconventional one, should write a book of so frankly a political and sociological nature as this is. One must reply that many Christian thinkers have come to feel that the central conception of Christianity is the Kingdom of God. In Christ's first "sermon" at Nazareth quoted in Luke's Gospel, He proclaimed that He had been anointed with the Spirit to proclaim the Good News to the poor, release to captives, sight to the blind and "the acceptable year of the Lord," i.e. the year of Jubilee which, according

to Jewish Law, meant relief from debts and a new beginning. A Christian cannot help rejoicing at the news that Congress ministries are trying to abolish *begar* (forced labour) and are launching out on comprehensive agrarian legislation. A Christian is committed to internationalism and must insist on a true brotherhood of man which inevitably cuts across racial domination and economic injustice. It is no longer possible—indeed, it never was—to make a division between sacred and secular, material and spiritual, social and personal. To remake individuals involves the making of a new environment where the individual can live the new life. The idealism which isolates religion from life must go once and for all. The failure of missionaries in India to see the denial of Christianity involved in racial pride and political domination has done much to neutralise their work in India.

Christians must regard nationalism with some suspicion, but Indian nationalism is still justified so long as it fights for self-government as a means to an end—the economic and social regeneration of a great country. There is in Indian politics, intermingled with the relativism and expediency of all politics, an ethical idealism and a desire to use moral means which, if it be not surrendered, can be a wonderful example to the world, but it must also be sternly realistic.

I have frankly expressed the opinion that India will be greatly assisted by the development of “class” organisations. This may be misunderstood. May I quote a passage from John Bennett’s *Christianity and the World* (he is a brilliant young disciple of Niebuhr): “To defend the rights of the less powerful groups to organise into dependent labour unions or into co-operatives is to have a part at the very point where the issue will be joined in the immediate future. . . . This concentration of power (economic and political)

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makes most people afraid. They are afraid to lose their jobs, if they have them; they are afraid to lose relief, if they are unemployed; teachers are afraid to speak their convictions; ministers are afraid to antagonise sources of the Church's income; workers are afraid to speak their minds or to let it be known how they vote; and many of the rest of us are afraid to antagonise the powers that be in the community for fear of losing customers or clients. This fear is a terrible threat to personal integrity, because it makes conformity so much safer than action in line with convictions. At the present the only way to overcome this fear is to organise those who are afraid. They must be organised into labour unions, teachers' unions, farm tenant unions, co-operatives and in other ways. This organisation of those who are afraid, if it is successful, inevitably leads to social struggle and bitterness. This stage of bitterness is more wholesome and constructive than the stage of fear." Both fear and bitterness are un-Christian but both are inevitable in a world such as ours, and we must change it. A Christian can only preserve his integrity by working for a world where compromise is unnecessary and in India this means both the struggle for independence—the right to put one's own house in order—and the struggle for justice within the country. The Socialists in India see these two tasks as one.

The Congress will be unable to avoid the implications of the class struggle, as is exemplified by the present struggle in Cawnpore and the recent decision of the U.P. land-owners to organise to protect their interests.

I have not been able to say in the text how much I have grown to love this land and its people. Despite so much that needs change, there is so much that is lovely and dignified, and even if one knows but little of the vernacular, one can detect the kindliness and the humour that greets

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a responsive stranger. Beneath the heavy weight of facts and figures I would ask the reader not to forget the people whom they represent. To Pandit Jawarhalal Nehru and Sri Jamnalal Bajaj I am grateful for the kind way in which they allowed me to stay at their homes, and I must also thank a number of friends who have read these chapters as they were written and made valuable criticisms. And for all faults and inadequate judgments, it is to Mother India herself that I must go for forgiveness.

SAT TAL.

*May, 1938.*

## FOUR CONTEMPORARY PEASANT SONGS COLLECTED BY D. SATYARTHI

1. From Maharashtra by a peasant who came to the first village session of the Congress and who sang this typical song in a semi-comic tone, having said, "What will you do with the songs of foolish villagers like me?"

*Oh bullock-cart driver!  
Poor bullock-cart driver!!  
On your bread so rough,  
You have only an onion—  
Is it for this, just tell me,  
You wander about the fields all the day long?  
Oh bullock-cart driver!  
Poor bullock-cart driver!!*

2. One stanza from a satirical song from Rajputana.

*The man, who knows you, O money-lender,  
Has come to understand every inch of you.  
You don't mind taking people's blood, unfiltered,  
But unfiltered water you cannot drink!*

3. Here is a song of the Punjabi peasant, so tired of life that he does not even want to take part in the village-dance.

*Make me not a peasant, O God,  
Make me not a peasant:  
In any future birth of mine, O God,  
Make me not a peasant!  
So poor look my crops, just glance,  
O how can I jump in the Gidha dance?  
They have confiscated my plough and yoke!  
And the corn I kept for seed I sold to feed my family.  
I have failed to pay the revenue-tax!  
Where is the profit of a peasant's labour?*

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*Make me not a peasant, O God,  
Make me not a peasant:  
In any next birth of mine, O God,  
Make me not a peasant!*

4. The Ahir of Behar cannot get inspiration for a song when he is hungry.

*Because of the hunger which is killing me  
I have lost my Birha song:  
Now there never comes to my mind  
Even a single kairi song.  
The beauty of my sweetheart now never inspires me:  
Then how can I go on  
With my old, old song!*

With acknowledgments to the *Contemporary Review*, Lahore (Editor, B. L. Bedi).

## CHAPTER ONE

### KISAN<sup>1</sup>

*"The first and most important business of a government is, after all, to contrive that its people live and not die."*

MATTHAI:

*"Village Government in British India"*

#### I

COME WITH ME to an Indian village.

It will not be easy to reach, especially in the rainy season, for there are no means of communication other than a jolting bullock-cart. These rough and uneven paths are quite unsuitable for a horse-tonga, while a motor-car would be out of the question. There are no metalled roads for miles and the primitive tracks are full of dust and dirt in summer and, in the rains, a sea of mud. Arrived at your destination, painfully hot, for there are no trees on the way to give their gracious shade, you find a little cluster of mud-huts with thatched roofs. In Bengal they may be made of sticks and straw or corrugated iron. Winds and rain wreck havoc, and it is a painful sight to see the inhabitants moving their cots from one spot to another in order to avoid the leaks. The walls are plastered with mud; lime for white-washing is a costly luxury and the people cannot afford it. My mind harks back to the trim white farms that so enliven the landscape of Denmark. Here cow-dung mixed with earth must suffice.

No electricity or even kerosene lamps, but earthen lamps in which mustard or neem oil give a flickering light. Oil is sometimes burnt in pots, but the smoke soon makes the air

<sup>1</sup> Peasant.



unfit to breathe. The only piece of furniture is the *charpoy* (string cot). A raised platform does service for sleeping, eating and other purposes. A fire burns in a little hearth for cooking, but there is no chimney to draw off the smoke. Windows or any other means of ventilation there are none; such are rare except in the best villages.

Staggering out to get some air, one is horrified by the surroundings. All kinds of refuse collect in the lanes and they become a drain for the dirty water from the houses; in the rains they become stinking cesspools. Round the houses you will find manure-pits and ponds, often enough stagnant and breeding mosquitoes—"the ghoul on wings," "the pointed fiend." These ponds often become the receptacle of night-soil, the pigs wallow in them and, worst of all, the cattle drink from them; the washerman uses them for soaking the clothes and men even bathe in them! How luxurious in contrast to these homes of India's millions are the pigsties of England!

The total wealth of a villager will be the cheap metal ornaments of the women-folk, mostly made of bell-metal, some earthen or, very occasionally, brass utensils, a small grinding-mill, one or two bullocks, and a few cheap agricultural implements. Except in Bengal where fish is eaten, the *Kisans* live on a monotonous diet; a gruel made of parched grain, flavoured with salt. Vegetables will only be eaten on festive occasions. Sugar they cannot afford. Because of intensive cultivation, the majority cannot keep milch-cattle, while even those who can have to sell their dairy-produce. All that remains for them is skimmed milk. For some months wheaten *chapatties* may be eaten.

Many cheap jibes have been made at Mahatma Gandhi's dress, but the "naked *fakir*" is a perpetual reminder of the ill-clothed peasantry. In all weather they have but little to wear and by no means all have blankets or quilts for the

cold. When the cold weather comes, and it is much colder than most foreigners suppose, they often cower all night by the warmth of a burning heap of cow-dung cakes. What few clothes they have are often tattered. If they fall ill, there are no doctors to attend them and, should they be persuaded to find their way to a city hospital, they are often received casually and not cared for. I myself have seen illiterate peasants in an out-patients' department waiting patiently for someone to read to them the "chit" which they had been given and being rebuffed by everyone. Advisers on sanitation and health are still too few; the result is that the people die like flies. The children are small for their age, with sunken eyes and horribly protruding bellies, a majority dying in infancy. A responsible witness at the Royal Agricultural Commission (R.A.C.) said that more died from malnutrition than through famine or epidemics.

In India the average expectation of life is 22.59 years (males) and 23.31 (females), as compared to 46.04 and 50.02 respectively in England. Recreation there is none. Post offices are far away. Schools are all too few. The peasants only live because men have an instinct to keep on living which cannot be quenched. The strange thing is that some of the Kisans are fine figures of men and there are splendid specimens of humanity among them. It is pathetic to see mean huts crudely decorated with bright colours, for art is not foreign to any peasantry, and there is in India a wealth of folk-song and dance. From morning till night the peasant works and in those seasons when there is no work to do he more often than not remains hungrily idle. At last with pride he may see a standing crop, but what happens? The Zemindar duns him for rent and the creditor attaches his crop in execution of his decree. Only too often the crop which he has tended with such loving care never reaches his house. Deprived of his crop, he is obliged to get seed on loan,

to secure other land at exorbitant rent, and, with borrowed bullocks and implements, start work again, but once the crop is ready he again loses it in payment of accumulated interest on loans or of rent. From one year to another he suffers in this vicious circle like a bird in a cage. The producer of grain cannot get enough to eat. The grower of cotton goes insufficiently clad, though he supplies not only Indian mills but exports large quantities to Japan.

R.A.C. said, "No one, we trust, desires to witness a continuation of a system under which people are born in debt, live in debt, and die in debt, passing on their burden to those who follow." Under such conditions it is no wonder that human material deteriorates. It is fortunate that the climate makes needs few. Religious traditions have made the peasant tolerate his existence and accept his fate but it has been prophesied<sup>1</sup> that the day may come when the discontented peasantry will rise in revolt against the existing order of things.<sup>2</sup> That day, as we shall see, has surely dawned.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mukhtar Singh in *Rural India*.

<sup>2</sup> "The trouble with India is a stomach trouble," said Mr. Purcell, M.P., in 1928. "... A penny a day increase in the family income would mean a tremendous improvement." The Simon Commission said that the average income in India per head in 1922 was less than £8 (equivalently), as compared to £95 in Great Britain. But since then conditions have become much worse. A Government Committee of Enquiry in 1931 stated that the average worked out at little over £3 a year. How can a man live on less than twopence a day? It is worth remarking that the *per capita* income in Japan is said to be more than 80 per cent. greater.

<sup>3</sup> A good deal of what has been said and much that I add hereafter will not apply altogether to the Punjab. In this province the existence to a large degree of peasant proprietors (for these are the zemindars of this province), together with the extensive canal schemes and, as I have been told, far better communications than in other provinces, makes the problem of the peasant rather different. The attractive books of Mr. Brayne give the impression that the peasant can improve his conditions himself, but I doubt whether this is really possible under the economic conditions which we shall see exist in U.P. or Behar and in other parts as well. In what follows, I have perhaps underestimated the sinister presence of the moneylender, and one missionary lady who has read what I have written and who has lived in the villages of Behar remarked that almost everything I said could have been written far more strongly.

But, it may be said, the fault lies with the cultivator to some extent. Land is cultivated in a primitive way, with very small holdings. The peasant is unscientific and his bad social customs increase his poverty. These things are often said and I myself have often been guilty of saying them. They will not survive examination. Nor will any attempt to lay the blame on nature or the increase of population. Let us examine these points for a moment.

If the yield per acre is less in India than elsewhere, it must be remembered that the soil has been producing from time immemorial. In the Punjab, newly recovered lands give a larger yield per acre than lands in U.P., despite inferior methods of cultivation. Land in New Zealand and U.S.A., for example, gives a higher yield because it has been brought under the plough in comparatively recent times. It is worth noting that the average yield of wheat and rice is far greater in India than Mexico, and compares well with other countries.

Again, when increased pressure upon the land causes the cultivator to turn to inferior soil, this will reduce the average yield. Irrigation facilities are only available to 16 per cent. of the total area cultivated. Were this not the case, the yield would be higher. It is not within the control of the cultivator in most cases to increase the yield. But a far more important fact is that increased yield will not, under existing economic conditions, improve the lot of the Kisan. In many countries it has not been found profitable to increase agriculture. One may refer to the burning of crops in more than one country and the artificial limitation of production (e.g. the marketing boards in England and such control as the limiting of the size and weight of potatoes, etc.). In 1932 there was a bumper crop of sugar cane in U.P. and the prices of raw sugar (*gur*) went down from 4 rupees to 1 rupee 10 annas a maund, a price never heard of before.

Steps had to be taken to prevent the importation of foreign sugar. American cotton-growers receive more for a crop of 9 million bales than for one of 13 millions, and a Committee appointed by the English Ministry of Agriculture went so far as to say that an unusually abundant crop might bring a heavy fall in prices, and, in the long run, cause the gross value of a large crop to be less than that of a small crop.<sup>1</sup> But here we find ourselves in the grip of the major paradox of capitalist economics!

As to primitive methods, one may point out that the Indian farmer is not nearly such a fool as his middle-class critics make him out to be. R.A.C. in a number of places gives credit to the Indian cultivator, e.g. "In the conditions in which the ordinary cultivator works, agricultural experts have found it no easy matter to suggest improvements." There are many references to the excellence of cultivation, e.g. evidence of "good cultivation" in Orissa, the Gujarati peasant "as efficient as any in the world," "the hard-working and patient cultivator of the Deccan," who is described as "excellent." Praise is even given to the simple Indian plough, but for specific reasons. We may conclude that, though old, methods of agriculture in India are by no means ineffective or so unscientific. In any case, lack of improvements is not a cause but an effect of the peasants' poverty.

It has been said by experts that the cost of consolidating holdings would be costly and unpracticable under existing conditions. Small plots are undoubtedly a hindrance, but consolidation would do little to give relief to the peasant. The pressure on land is so great that there is no certainty that further division would not take place. It is also a fact

<sup>1</sup> "The weather in America may physically be ideal through all wheat-raising sections and yet the year's work may be for the farmer a total failure. Another type of weather ruins him—a social weather in the control of which private ownership or capitalism as we know it, has broken down."—Bishop McConnell, *Christian Materialism*.

that existing rules of succession would have to be changed, but it has been found in Burma that the law of primogeniture, under which the eldest son inherits and has to pay a sum in cash to his brothers, has tended to increase the poverty of the people. Consolidation is hindered by landlordism. It is rendered more difficult by the fact that the land is often not homogeneous. R.A.C. admits that in Punjab consolidation was facilitated by the comparative homogeneity of the soil and simplicity of tenure.

Then, there is the question of population. Between 1891 and 1901 the increase of population in England was 12·17 per cent., in India only 2·4 per cent. In England from 1911 to 1921 the increase was 4·01 per cent., in India from 1901 to 1921 it was 7 per cent. Thus, the increase is less in India, but India not Britain has become poorer. Furthermore, it is worth pointing out that India not only produces food-stuffs for her own consumption but exports them, while England has to import articles of food. The density of population in India is 229 per 1,000. It appears seventh on a list given by Sir P. C. Ray. Several European countries have a greater density. Fascist propaganda recently has laid emphasis on the pressure of population as the motivation for their imperialist expansion, but many writers have pointed out that this is not the real cause. It is extremely doubtful if there is any country which could not support larger populations than it has got; certainly India could feed her people. It is tragic that children should be born in order to die or starve, but the number of births is not the cause of poverty and there is no reason why these children should not grow up to be happy and healthy, if other causes did not exist. Education and a higher standard of living might make birth-control a live issue, though there is still, as elsewhere, prejudice against it. Indian writers have pointed out that in former times there were a number of

checks and traditions which tended to limit births, but these have tended to disappear.

As to natural conditions, climate and the like, we cannot say that the peasant is absolutely dependent on the goodwill of the rain god! From early days artificial irrigation has been known in India. The average rainfall in India is 37 in.—more than enough—but a report on irrigation calculated that more than 35 per cent. of rainwater goes back to the sea. But 84 per cent. of the total area cultivated is not artificially irrigated. In some provinces ancient “tanks” have been allowed to fall into disrepair. Though Ceylon is not India, I may be allowed to refer to the *dry* area of that island. It forms a striking contrast to the vivid green of the rest of the island. I was amazed at the aridity of this district, but in ancient times it was most fertile. With the new emphasis on plantations the tanks were neglected, fell into disrepair and the desert of to-day is the result.

Much has been said of the peasants’ extravagance. It is a precarious argument. It is true that much money is spent on weddings and *melas* (religious fairs), but is it to be wondered at? The life of the Kisan is one of bitter drudgery and these events come as an oasis in the desert. We cannot blame the peasant for occasionally escaping from the miseries of his life. The social customs which give him sanction come down from a happier age when the barns were full of grain and the cattle were plentiful.

It is hard to shake off old habits and the peasant is generally conservative, but we cannot ask him to change his ways, unless we give him some alternative means of recreation, and these might well prove more costly in the long run. The Banking Enquiry of 1931, in its Committees, concluded that the picture of the peasants’ extravagance was overdrawn. “Social and religious customs make but a small contribution to the total indebtedness.”

The moneylender is often made the villain of the piece and it cannot be denied that his is not a pleasant rôle. But in existing circumstances the poor man cannot get credit at low rates. In U.P. till recently even co-operative societies charged 15 per cent. What security has a tenant whose bullocks are loaned, whose land is rented on the strength of a good crop (i.e. he will pay after harvest) and who has not even a house which he may mortgage. The future crop is the only tangible security. The high rate of interest is due to the poverty of the peasant. One cannot excuse usury, but till the whole system is changed, it is difficult to see how it can be eliminated. Congress ministries are getting legislation through the Assemblies to control the activities of the moneylender, but as long as the farmer's life is one long speculation he will get into debt. England has given huge sums in subsidies to farming, but in India in famine time the Government of India lent money at the rate of  $7\frac{1}{2}$  per cent., to be recovered in two or three years. Were the peasant less poor, he would be less likely to get into debt.

## 2

But this grinding poverty has not always been the peasants' lot. "Of all the professions agriculture is the best," says an old Hindi proverb. The old village was self-sufficing; it was not isolated, but it produced virtually everything it needed. Every village was in a sense a "commune" and it has been said that there was no private property in land, but this is an extremely controversial question. Modern authorities are inclined to the view that property in land did exist but subject to the strictest control by the highly centralised State.<sup>1</sup> From time to time land was reallotted. Large areas were left for pasture land and good milch cattle were available. It is said that Nature was so abundant that in some

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Dr. Ghosal, *Land System in Ancient India*.



cases the land was only cultivated once in three years. It is true that in time of famine grain could not easily be transported as to-day, but grain-stores existed in every village. A portion of grain was given to the ruler; the land given as grant to temples and village officials was not taxed, neither was the common land. The requirements of the village were simply satisfied by local artisans who had their hereditary occupations. Thus the *chamar*, who to-day still suffers from the odium of his work of tanning, has not even the satisfaction of that work in the face of competition in the form of cheap shoes from abroad.

In India one can see the ruin of feudal society still in process. A few articles not made in the village were bought at local markets. There were a number of village functionaries, such as the headman (*patil*), watchman (*chowkidar*) and accountant (*patwari*). Every village had its *panchayat* (council), under which these officials served and by which they might be brought to book if they should be unsatisfactory in the performance of their duties. The *patil* was elected by common consent on the basis of his character. His duties were wide. The *panchayat* worked through a number of committees; the mode of election was thoroughly democratic. In the early days of British rule cases were referred to *panchayats*, and it was laid down that they should not be interfered with, but Matthai remarks that "it is clear from the beginning there was a somewhat strong feeling among the officers of the East India Company against the institution of *panchayats*. . . ." They did not merely settle disputes or caste questions, as some have said, but looked after sanitation and other works of public utility.

During Muslim rule, these village communities were left more or less to their own devices, except for the payment of taxes. The advent of the Company meant the disintegration

of village India. It is true that the old village officials survived, but they had become mere servants of the Government. To-day the people feel that they are spies of the police and no longer their own folk. The *chowkidar* now gets a salary from the Government and is the link between the villagers and the police. The *patwari* also is no longer paid by the people. They cannot know if the elaborate papers in his possession are correct. It is difficult to get hold of the village papers very often and a corrupt *patwari* is a further source of oppression to the peasant. Thus, it will be seen that the old village functionaries have been incorporated in the cadre of Government servants. Only too often the villagers fear and hate them.

Another fruitful source of trouble has been the growth of law courts. The villager cannot understand this alien and complicated mechanism. Heavy court-fees have to be paid and a lawyer found; then there is the High Court and the Privy Council. One has to admit that the peasant has become a terrible litigant. Only too commonly he finds that the scales of justice are weighted in favour of the man with the longest purse. The Law has no roots in the life of the countryside and no sanctions. It is not surprising that the peasant is demoralised and often inclined to deceitfulness. This point was strongly emphasised in an article by a distinguished Indian lawyer some time ago. The drain through the high officials of Government and High Court fees has helped to impoverish the peasant.

The land no longer belongs to the village community. Under Muslim rule the Zemindars were simply tax-collectors, but under British rule they have become landlords. There is abundant evidence to show how oppressive they have been in their exactions. I hasten to add that one must not make generalised statements. It is enough to say that, while in former times after paying a quota to the

Government the land belonged to the peasant, to-day only too often exorbitant rents are extorted from him. In U.P. and Behar a veritable class-war has developed between Kisan and Zemindar. But it must be remembered that on *ryotwari* land the Zemindar is a peasant proprietor, though the weight of land revenue and the alienation of land through debt is making even the lot of the peasants of this kind very miserable.<sup>1</sup>

The Report of the U.P. Provincial Congress Committee issued in 1931 is still worth studying. It was issued not long after the Gandhi-Irwin Agreement. Prices had never touched so low a level as at this time, lower than in the period between 1896 and 1900. The very foundations of rural economy were shaken; even the privileged and occu-

<sup>1</sup> *The Zemindari System.*—All authorities agree that during the Hindu and Mohammedan periods the legal ownership of the land belonged either to the State or to the cultivator, or to the village community. Middlemen between the cultivator and the State did exist, but they had no absolute proprietary rights in land. Most of them were mere revenue collectors. They were entrusted with this responsibility by the Government on return for a prescribed remuneration in the form of a percentage of the total revenue collected by them.

Revenue farmers were found all over the Mogul Empire but with the decline of the Empire and the consequent weakness of the central government they grew in number and made themselves the virtual owners of the land under their control. Few of them were of the old aristocracy of the land. Most of them were men of no distinction who had taken advantage of the troubled times, sometimes by fraud, sometimes by deeds of sale or violence, to become the nominal proprietors.

When the British assumed political power they found the proprietary rights in land in a state of chaotic confusion. In Bengal, Behar, U.P. and North Madras they recognised the Zemindars or *talugdars* as the real proprietors, thereby gaining the loyal allegiance of a considerable class of "landlords," as now these middlemen considered themselves. In some parts the Government entered into direct revenue agreements with the cultivators. Under the Zemindari system the peasantry suffered as the Zemindars had great power, and a chain of tenants and sub-tenants grew up who squeezed the cultivator to the utmost. Rack-renting and forceable evictions became common. The Government passed a few tenancy laws, but these were often evaded. We have seen what is the position to-day. In the *ryotwari* areas, for reasons given above, land is passing into the hands of big landlords or moneylenders.

The Madras Government, generally regarded as the most moderate of the Congress Ministries, has been rushing through the legislature a Rural Indebtedness Bill which its oponents have attacked as "expropriatory and revolutionary." It is neither, but it shows how vigilant are the vested interests to detect anything which may weaken their position.

pancy tenants were affected. Sir Malcolm Hailey, then Governor of U.P., has admitted that the foundations of existing rents had collapsed and far-reaching changes were necessary, but at that time there was no evidence to show that the Government was in any way prepared for any drastic measures. The agony of the cultivator was intense. The Congress threatened to start a no-rent campaign and the peasant took the threat literally. Mahatma Gandhi endeavoured to secure minimum relief for the Kisan but with little success. He appealed to both Kisan and Zemindar for mutual toleration. But the Government pressed the landlords and they in their turn fell upon the under-dog. People lost hope and were in no mood to pay. The Government resented Congress intervention. Restraints and repression became the order of the day. Harrowing stories might be told of the treatment of the Kisans. Tenants were beaten; moveable property attached; women were maltreated in a disgraceful manner. Free licence was given to the Zemindars, and both police and revenue officers were put at their disposal.<sup>1</sup>

Slowly the peasants were becoming conscious of their strength. Even in 1921, Nehru in his autobiography describes how the peasants took to mass travelling without any tickets! As early as 1922 some kind of Kisan agitation had been undertaken by the Congress. Mahatma Gandhi has carried on his *satyagraha* campaigns at Champaran in Behar and Bardoli in Gujerat, but a new note of rebelliousness began to creep in as despair intensified. In the U.P. the Kisan was not disposed to pay his rent and was even unprepared to listen to the Mahatma.

The 1937 Congress Session was held in a village—at

<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that in villages where police stations are non-existent or the local officials weak, Imperialism controls the peasantry through the Zemindars.

## THE PRESENT CONDITION OF INDIA

Faizpur in the Bombay Presidency—and the Committee was instructed to draw up a comprehensive scheme for an agrarian programme. Indeed, one had already been called for at the Lucknow Session in 1936. It was agreed that there should be:

1. Rent and Revenue reductions.
2. The exemption of uneconomic holdings from rent or land-tax.
3. A tax on agricultural incomes, subject to a minimum.
4. The lowering of canal and other irrigation dues.
5. The abolition of all feudal dues, levies, and forced labour.
6. Fixity of tenure with heritable rights.
7. Co-operative farming to be encouraged.
8. A debt moratorium.
9. The wiping-out of arrears of rent.
10. The provision of common pasture lands, and the rights of the people in wells, ponds, forests and the like recognised.
11. Arrears of rents to be recovered in the same manner as civil debts, and not by ejectment.
12. Statutory provision for securing a living wage and suitable working conditions for agricultural labourers.
13. Recognition of peasant unions.

These reforms are extensive, but it will be noted that they do not suggest the immediate abolition of the Zemindari system. During the Provincial Elections, when President Nehru had gone on a whirlwind tour of the country, he emphasised the economic demands of the peasantry, and when the Congress took office last year Kisan questions immediately became front-page news. During the elections, the Kisan had expressed in no mild terms his confidence in the Congress and looked forward to a new régime with the highest expectations. The Congress Left Wing had thrown

itself into the work of organising Kisan Sabhas. In the U.P. and in Behar particularly huge rallies of Kisans took place. In some parts the primary committees of the Congress were almost Kisan Sabhas themselves but the growth of the Sabhas as such is an event of great importance. The U.P. is an urbanised province with many large cities, and the Congress there is largely supported by the lower middle class, which is open to being radicalised. But Behar is purely rural. Patna, its capital, is no larger than a very minor town in the U.P. Consequently in Behar the Congress has contained large elements of the Zemindar class, there being little or no middle class. This explains the growth of Kisan Sabhas as distinct from Congress Committees.

There can be no doubt that the fatalistic and down-trodden peasant is a being of the past. The cultivator is feeling his strength and learning lessons of solidarity. But there has been a tendency to force the pace. The Congress Ministries brought with them a new atmosphere of civil liberty, but side by side with the genuine Socialists and Communists there were interested folk, people only anxious to exploit the Kisan for their own ends. It was a temptation to embarrass the new ministries. The Kisans were told not to pay their rents and the Ministers had to warn them that, till the laws were altered, this would involve ejection, profiting the landlords rather than the tenants. Some began to speak of expropriation; a fearsome idea for the middle class. The Zemindars of Behar took fright and actually threatened to offer *satyagraha*!

It must be remembered that the Congress is a block of nationalist concentration to win independence, and can hardly be expected to enact purely Socialist measures or to liquidate the Zemindars. They had never been committed to this. The Kisan leaders were struck by the rapid acceleration in the tempo of the Kisan movement and were inclined to

criticise the Ministers severely. They thought of mass demands as being the main weapon in the armoury of the "United Front" against Imperialism, while the Ministerialists tended to be timid of mass organisations other than the Congress itself, and to see opposition where it was not always intended. It is true that legislation affecting the Kisans was often of a mild character. But in the U.P., Behar and Bengal the agrarian problem is most pressing. In Bengal there is no Congress Ministry. It is agreed that the conditions of the peasants in that province are deplorable. The Health Report for Bengal 1927-8 said "that the present peasantry of Bengal are in a very large proportion taking to a dietary on which rats could not live for more than five weeks."

But it is in Behar that activity and controversy have been most obvious. We have seen how the Zemindars put pressure on the Ministry; the Kisans were drastic in their demands. Their agitation has thrown up a remarkable leader in Swami Sahajanand. As his name suggests, he is a *sannyasi*, i.e. a man dedicated to religion and wearing the saffron robe, but he has become an uncompromising Socialist and spokesman for the peasants. I saw him at the last Congress, where he was not given any opportunity to speak except right at the beginning. He is a lean, shaven-headed man of about forty, excitable and eloquent. Even some of his friends criticise him for a tendency to quick temper and a certain lack of tact. In some ways he rather reminds me of an Indian John Ball; the priest of Kent who led the Peasants' Revolt would have much in common with this Indian man of God become Socialist.

In a speech at Patna he defended himself against the allegation that he was creating dissension and an atmosphere calculated to destroy the non-violence to which the Congress is committed. After saying that none but a lunatic would think of weakening the Congress at the present stage of

India's struggle for independence, he professed himself to be heart and soul with the Congress, but said that he felt that he must fight shoulder to shoulder with his downtrodden brethren and that was why he was organising the Kisan movement. He strongly repudiated the charge that he had advocated violence, because the use of force would always react against the Kisans themselves.

At this point it must be explained that Babu Rajendra Prasad, an elder statesman and ex-President of the Congress, the acknowledged leader of Behar and one of the most typical disciples of Gandhi, had justified the action of certain district committees in dissociating themselves from the Kisan Sabhas and banning Swami Sahajanad. He also supported the Provincial Congress Committee in threatening the Kisan workers with disciplinary measures. He said that Kisan workers had agitated against the Ministers, accusing them of not caring for the Kisans and had told the Kisans to give the Zemindars a taste of their *dandas* (clubs or staves carried by peasants). He quoted the slogan which he said was used, "How will you get your rents? Long live my *danda*." As the result of such propaganda a serious clash might occur between Kisan and Zemindar and the Government had been compelled to take precautionary measures. Indeed it is worth mentioning that since the Congress took office more than 100 *kisan* workers have been arrested. Rajendra Babu also referred to the "foul propaganda" against the Congressmen during the elections, when they were accused of selling themselves to the Zemindars.

Swami Sahajanand denied that he had ever introduced the slogan quoted or had ever heard it used, but he said that he had asked the Kisans to defend themselves with force if necessary and to resist the illegal acts of the agents of the Zemindars. He denied that this was violence, but insisted that it was an act sanctioned by the Indian Penal Code



itself. Far from preaching violence, he had checked it, for he had stopped the assaults on the Kisan, trespass into his home, and violation of his womenfolk, formerly indulged in by the Zemindars' men. And, he said, he was proud of it. To-day, as the result of their work, the Zemindars were anxious to hand over their Zemindari to the Government after due compensation, but, he asked, why should they receive compensation? One does not give compensation for stolen property. The land had belonged to the Kisans till a stroke of Lord Cornwallis' pen had deprived them of it. Why had he, a *sannyasi*, undertaken this work? He had seen a dead man being carried to the burning ghat wrapped in a miserable piece of rag, and it had struck him that the man who had produced in his lifetime food for millions had nothing to cover his corpse when he died. He had been cut to the quick by the injustice of it. It was said that God fed men; he had never seen it, but the Kisan fed thousands with the crop raised by his labour. Thus, the Kisan to him had risen to the status of God and he had vowed to serve God through service of the Kisan. He wanted to root out an order which allowed the producer of wealth to go hungry while the landlord's dog lay on velvet, and he was not prepared to compromise. But he reiterated that he had no desire to injure the Congress.

This rather embittered controversy is instructive. Some have seen in it a symptom of a split within the Congress, but it is not so. It is merely a symptom of that increasing class-consciousness which the older generation cannot accept. We may trace this story to its end at the Haripura Congress this year, when many expected there would be bitter debate about the Kisan Sabhas and their final banning as regards Congressmen. But the Congress met against the background of a crisis, for the Ministers of Behar and U.P. had resigned. It was no time for splits. The official

resolution was made milder than had been expected and there was little or no discussion. The resolution warned the Kisan Sabhas that they must regard themselves as subsidiary to the Congress and called upon the Congress Committees to redouble their efforts on behalf of the peasantry. All the Kisan leaders and the Socialists are agreed that they must continue to maintain a united front against imperialism and that at present this means working in and for the Congress. But there are great divergencies of outlook.

On August 23rd, 1937, Kisans from all over Behar marched 50,000 strong to Patna under a sea of red flags and Congress flags to make their demands and on November 26th one *lakh* (100,000) came pouring into the city, an unending stream, on foot, shouting and singing their national and class slogans and songs and ditties composed by themselves in their own dialects. In February, 1938, some 60,000 peasants of U.P. marched in excellent order, again with red flags and Congress flags to Lucknow, where they quietly demonstrated outside the Council Hall. Here they were addressed by the Premier and by Pandit Nehru.

The Kisan leaders believe that mass agitation will strengthen the hands of the Ministers in face of the Zemindars' demands. But, as we have seen, in Behar the Provincial Working Committee of the Congress rejected the idea of unity and bade Congress workers keep aloof from the activities of the Kisan Sabhas. But in what sense are they anti-Congress? Is it to the interest of the Congress that under its rule the illegal violence of the Zemindars' men and the legal violence of the State should unite to suppress the peasant movement? In Behar legislation has been passed after an agreement with the Zemindars. The Kisan Sabhas have criticised it, but it cannot be gainsaid that it does provide considerable relief. It is certainly less satisfactory than the original proposed legislation, and the

Zemindars get some protection. Some of the provisions implement the Faizpur Congress programme but the Zemindars have struck a good bargain. One nationalist paper (*Hindustan Standard*) said of the agreement that it does not appear as beneficial to the Kisan as it should have been.

This provincial issue has seemed to me worth dealing with at some length, for during the last six months or so it has been very prominent. The U.P. Ministry has just prepared new legislation on Tenancy and an amusing interlude took place recently in the Assembly, when one of the Ministers referred to landlords as mere rent-collectors. An instructive debate followed. But in the long run, remission of a degree of past rent or debt cannot bring prosperity to the peasant. There are other factors to be considered.

3

The destruction of Indian cottage industry led to an enormous pressure on the land. India was forced to supply raw materials to other lands and to import finished goods from abroad. In 1881 only 58 per cent. lived on agriculture; in 1891 it went up to 61·06 per cent., while in 1929 R.A.C. gave 73·9 per cent as the figure. It is interesting to compare the figures in Denmark, for example, where, during the years 1880 to 1921, the agricultural population fell from 71 per cent. to 57 per cent. Similar figures could be quoted from other countries. While they have largely taken to making finished products, India remains an increasingly agricultural country, and 76 per cent. of the holdings are of less than 10 acres. This surely means that there is a dangerous lack of balance between industry and agriculture—too many people live on the land. Peasant proprietorship is almost certain to become general in India,

but there are other technical considerations to bear in mind.

World events affect India; we have seen how the depression affected the U.P. peasants. Prices involve such questions as the management of currency. The Central Government has adopted measures to maintain the price of the rupee. From 1926 to 1930 there has been a contraction of money in circulation. As India exports primary products, it is to the interest of foreigners to keep prices low, but this means a loss of crores of rupees to the agriculturalist. But India has had no control over her own fiscal policy. Again, financial resources are wasted to maintain the artificial ratio of the rupee. It is fixed at 1s. 6d., and this also forces agriculturalists to sell more cheaply. When England went off the gold standard, the rupee was not allowed to find its own level. All this means loss to the cultivator.

One may be allowed just to refer also to the high bank rate even when cheap money is available, and the manner in which Government borrows at a high rate of interest. The country's savings flow into Government coffers and are not used for new industries or for agricultural development. Bounties or subsidies have never been granted to Indian agriculture as far as I know, nor has there been much attempt to protect the producer by tariffs as in other countries. I touch upon these technical matters with diffidence but they cannot be ignored.

"Little progress in rural development can be hoped for without literacy" (R.A.C.), but boys educated under existing conditions seem useless on the land and often become a drag on their families. And even those who take expensive courses at agricultural colleges are often hindered by lack of opportunities. "The proportion of boys of school-going age attending primary schools is still disappointingly small" (R.A.C.). Free compulsory education is essential and it is

being envisaged in what is known as the "Wardha scheme," which was initiated by Gandhi recently. It is too early to say much about the scheme which has marked upon it the stamp of at least two first-class educationalists. It aims at a basic education of seven years, including a knowledge of the mother-tongue and of Hindi. The education will find its focus in a basic craft which will provide the "peg" on which everything else will be hung. The syllabus has been published in India and is well worth study. One cannot resist making the comparison between India and U.S.S.R. in this matter of education. In India the percentage of literacy is 12 (males) and 1·8 (females), while in U.S.S.R. more than 71 out of every 100 children are in school. The percentage in 1929 was 98·4 in cities and 66 in villages, but the figures must be much higher to-day. Before the Great War the figures were 37·9 per cent. (males) and 12·5 per cent. (females). This amazing increase was achieved in a state faced with every kind of obstacle. One may also quote the example of Turkey, where general literacy has been attained. Yet in India only a small percentage of children attend school. The Simon Commission stated that in India as a whole 17 out of every 100 men and 2 out of every 100 women over twenty years of age were entered as literate.

In old times education was by no means neglected in India and though it is true that the *shudras* (agricultural caste) were not expected to study the scriptures and indeed most unpleasant punishments were devised for them should they do so, yet illiteracy was not enjoined upon them. King Ashvapati claimed that in his kingdom not a single person was illiterate and Matthai tells us that the schoolmaster had a definite place in the village economy. He was paid by rent-free lands and assignments of grain. It is interesting to note that the Government of C.P., in its new scheme of

*Vidya Mandirs*, thinks of a return to this system by grants of lands to schools which will be worked by the State. Priests were also told to impart instruction. The three R.'s were taught, and sometimes a little Sanskrit, poetry or grammar. There is no doubt that schools existed in India from time immemorial, nor were the women altogether neglected in this respect. But the endowments of the indigenous schools were gradually destroyed and the provision of new primary schools was neglected.

It is clear that an illiterate peasantry cannot cope with the problems of production in the modern world. They will be cheated and oppressed and unable to avail themselves of new methods. Agricultural research goes on in India. A recent newspaper report gives an impressive survey of Government activity, but it is also a fact that it is often out of touch with the day-to-day life of the cultivator, who tends to distrust alien experts when he meets them. Research must be in the closest touch with the actual cultivators. Recently, in Burma, I was much impressed by an agricultural school run by a Baptist Mission at Pyinmana. Here village boys learnt by practical experience how best to exploit the resources at their disposal, and were enabled to return to their villages as effective apostles of new methods, able by force of results to win others to them. In India the village community of Ushagram at Asansol in Bengal seems a good experiment. Education in India must be made "polytechnical" as far as possible and have in view the real needs of the village. The Wardha scheme is a real attempt to face the problem. Mr. Darling, in his well-known book on rural reconstruction in the Punjab, says that expenditure on agriculture is far less than in the West. It seems that there is a serious lack of opportunity for a grounding in rural education and no means of discovering the real problems of the farmer and solving them.

Rural uplift has become the fashion. The Viceroy is photographed with a stud bull, and on all sides the Government is anxious to further "rural schemes," but these are often ineffectual because of the gap between the official and the peasant, and often they are an attempt to mitigate the present militant outlook of the peasant. But the Congress in office is carrying on this work, and it is to be hoped that it will be able to help the villager by gaining his confidence, for the Congress is closer to the people than any previous government has been. The U.P. Government has appointed a Rural Commissioner and budgeted for rural workers.

Co-operative societies have been started on a considerable scale, but they have met with difficulties, partly due to their being officially sponsored. They have not solved the problem of indebtedness; in one case I was told that the peasants preferred the moneylender, because he gave them a lower rate and was less stern in demanding the loan back. In any case the real problem is not only getting money, but paying it back! Official organisations cannot have the spirit which has made co-operation so successful in certain other countries. Much is said of Sir Daniel Hamilton's successful experiment at Gosaba in Bengal, but I have not been able to visit it. It must be said that the idea of co-operation has not yet "taken on." The peasant does not realise its advantages. Red-tape methods make it hard for him to get loans quickly and he is frightened by the strict rules for repayment. Unfortunately, co-operation in India has generally meant credit societies. Societies to improve output, to provide new methods, to effect sales might be more likely to attract the peasant. But so much depends upon the organisers.

Marketing is a crying need. The most serious weakness is transport. Railways in India have not been an unmixed

blessing, though they are generally singled out as an example of the white man's beneficence. Huge sums have been expended in concessions to the companies. The operation of the railways has been costly and their administration often top-heavy. Freight charges have always been high. Until the railways are owned by the State and the necessary machinery made in the country instead of being brought from abroad at great expense, there is little hope of reduction. The peasant has to sell cheaply because of heavy freight charges and he is exposed to unfair foreign competition, for his competitors have low shipment charges. The development of railways has wrought economic havoc in rural areas. Between 1929 and 1931 it was cheaper to sell Canadian wheat in the ports of India than the home product. The freight charges of sugar from Java to Indian ports are about 8 annas a maund, while the charges from Bombay or Calcutta to Meerut (U.P.) are 2 rupees.<sup>1</sup> R.A.C. admits that it is difficult to import fuel at cheap rates and this is worth remembering when we blame the peasant for burning valuable farm-manure. India has great forests all over the country, but wooden articles are imported and, till recently, even railway sleepers. Freight charges make it hard to transport or to popularise agricultural implements. Artificial manures from thousands of miles away can be brought to the peasant, but, because of rail charges, he cannot get bone-meal or saltpetre of Indian origin or the valuable vegetable mould contained in the forests. Thanks to lack of adequate cold storage, it is virtually impossible to transport dairy produce. Concessions have been made for cane traffic, but on the whole the railways are not the help to the cultivator that they might be.

There are vast potentialities in electric power in India, as

<sup>1</sup> These figures are not quite up-to-date, but I doubt whether there has been much change.



yet more or less unexplored. It is not utopian to envisage the day when villages not only have electric light, but carry on their local industries with power at a cheap rate. Russia has already seen the importance of power for agriculture. For the production of cheap manures, for effective irrigation, for all manner of industries power is essential.

As to village industries, this is a cause most dear to the heart of Mahatma Gandhi. The *khadi* movement is now established and Congress governments even consider protecting it. Other industries, such as the preparation of *gur* (raw sugar) and oil-pressing, are being developed by the Village Industries Association, but the whole movement tends to be prejudiced against mechanical methods and large-scale production. For many it seems to be a return to a bygone age. But it is difficult to ascertain how far it represents a maximum or a minimum programme. Is it an emphasis on what is now possible with the hope that when India is free a planned economy might be set in motion, whereby decentralised industries might be carried on in the villages while a few great factories conducted certain necessary processes in the great cities? There might be much to be said for this. One sympathises with the Gandhi-men's prejudice against the colossal leviathans of Europe. Such a monstrous aggregate of humanity as London has become cannot be justified, and it is proving itself a very dangerous weakness in an era of air-warfare. At the same time, when the Gandhi-men think that the elaborate processes of modern industry could be divided so that parts of a motor-car might be made in innumerable small factories (this was actually suggested to the writer by one of them), they clearly fail to realise the complex nature of modern industrial technique and the problems of expensive transport.

On the other hand, there is a trend in Gandhi's thought which is thoroughly inimical to modern mass-production

methods altogether. Some of his followers carry their prejudice against modern invention to absurd lengths, using only reed-pens and crudely-made paper. But there must be inevitable inconsistencies. Though Gandhi often rides in a motor-car, he as frequently protests against it and would like to perambulate the villages in a bullock-cart. How long he would live and how far he could penetrate the country under such conditions is hard to see. The present power of the Congress is largely due to the indefatigable energy of Pandit Nehru, who, with the help of car, train, aeroplane and, in remote parts, the bullock-cart, got into touch with a larger proportion of the vast population of India than any man has ever done before. That this great sub-continent is within appreciable distance of becoming a united nation is largely due to the advantages of modern transport.

Again, Mahatma Gandhi has had to use the skill of modern surgery, which on one occasion at least saved his life. I saw recently the beautiful and costly instrument used to test his blood-pressure. He no doubt feels that this is a concession to weakness, but those who value his life feel otherwise. At the same time it would be unwise to say that Gandhi denies the value of modern invention altogether. He would welcome the advent of electricity to the villages and its use to improve the efficiency of the village industries. He approves of the sewing-machine, but he and his followers are proud of being individualists and they hate mass production. But Gandhi is not an idealist. I sometimes think that he is in the proper sense of the word a materialist. He does not wish to wait till the millennium or even till Purna Swaraj, and thinks that by his crude village wooden machinery (much of it looks like a Heath Robinson cartoon!) he can immediately improve the lot of the peasantry without a vast expenditure, which is impossible under

existing conditions. Those who conduct the All-India Spinners' Association make great claims for it and say that it has done much for the peasants who have adopted the *charka* (spinning-wheel). They pride themselves on having secured a minimum wage for all workers in the Association. As one who habitually wears *khadi*, I can testify to its durability and great attractiveness, but the Morris-Ruskin school has rather lost its charms for those who can see the poetry in a great chimney-stack or the glossy beauty of some great machine with its sense of harnessed power. I remember once seeing the biggest X-ray apparatus in England, a gloriously beautiful complex of steel and glass, and I could not help thinking that in its own way it was as creatively lovely and impressive as a gothic cathedral. The Gandhi-men believe that modern factory-life reduces the richness of individual life and that it inevitably involves class-struggle and a destruction of many valuable things in human life. They fail, I think, to distinguish between the use of machinery by free men to provide themselves with an abundant life and to control the natural order (surely in itself a deeply spiritual thing, cf. the Biblical injunction "to replenish the world and subdue it") and the abuse of machinery in a capitalist society when it becomes an instrument of power and a means to profit in the hands of a few.

After the Haripura Congress Gandhi expressed his disappointment:

*Khadi* has been conceived as the foundation and the image of Ahimsa. A real *khadi*-wearer will not utter an untruth. A real *khadi*-wearer will harbour no violence, no deceit, no impurity. . . . Seven and a half *lakhs* have gone to the making of Vithalnaga (the Congress town built at Haripura). There are many things I have liked, but it lacks the spirit of *khadi*. . . . Where there is the conscious endeavour to fulfil the spirit of *khadi*, there is no place for the expenditure of seven and a half *lakhs*. I said that we should be

able to hold a village session at the outside expense of Rs. 5,000. . . . Well, the idea has still not left my mind. . . . Rural-mindedness and electrical illuminations go ill together. Nor have motor cars and motor lorries any place there. They took me to Faizpur and they brought me to Haripura in a car. They would not even take me in a bullock-cart . . . the  $7\frac{1}{2}$  lakhs would not have been spent here if we were *khadi*-minded. Here there are petrol and oil engines and water-pipes, stoves and electricity, most of the modern city-dwellers' amenities, including the tooth-paste and scented hair-oils. The villager is, or should be, unspoilt by these things. His brush is the fresh baul stick and his powder is salt and charcoal. . . . Some Socialist friends are impatient with us and say that Gandhi's days are gone and a new age is upon us. I welcome plain-spokenness. If you think that what I say deserves to be rejected, do by all means reject it. Do what you do for the sake of India, not for my sake. . . . If we miss the spirit of *khadi* and make a fetish of it, we are no better than gross idolaters. . . . Something within me tells me that herein I am not wrong. (*Harijan*, February 26.)

I make this long quotation because it seems to me that it contains the quintessence of "Gandhism." Pandit Nehru said to me that of course this ideal was quite impossible. At the Faizpur Congress they were unable to feed the multitudes which came to it: What of sanitation and the dangers of typhoid? How could such great crowds or even the delegates just inhabit a village for the Congress session?

I sometimes wonder whether the Mahatma's utterances do not contain an almost playful hyperbole. He takes up extreme positions in order to goad his followers into a reasonable approximation to them and then he is not satisfied. It is a kind of stimulus. But the Socialist cannot feel happy about the position. He thinks of the peasants of Russia at last discovering new and insatiable demands, having new desires and new needs. This disgusts the Mahatma. At the root of his teaching is an emphasis on asceticism and the reduction of one's demands. There is nothing

dirty or squalid about his conceptions. No one has done more than he to call India to cleanliness and self-respect. He has done scavenging work with his own hands and calls the *bourgeois* to like respect for menial tasks. It is a testimony to his influence that at Haripura the all-important sanitary work and scavenging was done by educated Gujarati youths and very admirable it was too. (And one must remember that this work has always been relegated to the Harijan, who were condemned to untouchability because of it.) My first talk with Gandhi was about the best methods of disposing of night-soil! Gandhi's extremism is aimed at breaking down the gulf between the educated middle class and the villager and what he believes to be a false standard of living. The time must come when a mean is struck between his asceticism and the new wine of Socialism, but the Socialists can and must learn a good deal from his discipline even if they feel that he is a new Canute trying to stem the waves of progress.

There may be much to be said for an interim policy of simple crafts, but it is worth recalling that the R.A.C. said that "the possibilities of improving the condition of the rural population by the establishment of rural industries are extremely limited" and this judgment would be upheld by many experts. First things must come first, and, while there may be a great future for decentralised factories, the first need is to ensure for the peasant security of tenure, and the political freedom which alone can make it possible to have a concerted plan for economic development for the whole country. Careful planning is necessary; State farms are a possibility in certain parts; and, above all, the speedy liquidation of illiteracy. The country is enormously wealthy in natural resources. The grinding poverty of the masses is not only a crime; it is unnecessary. Russia is beginning to organise her productive forces and feed and clothe and

educate the peasantry, though this has admittedly been brought about with a degree of violence which tends to make the Congressman in India refuse to consider even its practical implications for India. India can organise her economic life also; but—

What will the vested interests do? What will England do?

## CHAPTER TWO

### MAZDOOR<sup>1</sup>

*"The Indian Industrial worker is in receipt of wages which are insufficient to satisfy even the primary needs of civilised existence."*

LOKANATHAN:

*"Industrial Organisation in India"*

#### I

LET US RETURN to the village whence we set out. There is great excitement. A visitor has come from the great city. How smart he is in his town clothes and how well-fed he looks! He tells the peasants how much better off they would be if they would go and work in the city. They would get good wages, so that they could pay off their debts and on their return purchase more land. Then, life in the city was so interesting; such fine buildings and entertainments. Like fascinated children, they listen to his tales and afterwards discuss them with animation. Such a life would be so much better than theirs. The stranger offers loans to pay the travelling expenses and makes himself responsible for finding them work on their arrival. Some prepare eagerly to set out on this new adventure.

With what expectations do they reach the city after a long journey. The noise and bustle of the traffic frightens them; passers-by all seem so brusque and cold. The villager feels lonely in this strange new world.

The first night they sleep in the street outside the station. After some difficulty they find their way to the factory and once more meet the stranger of the village. He seems less friendly now; curt and somewhat imperative. Soon they

<sup>1</sup> Worker.

learn that the reality is very different from their expectations so sedulously awakened by the stranger. He was a Sirdar (jobber) sent out to recruit labour from the villages.

They soon discover that his promises were worthless. Work there is, but how long the hours and how low the wages! For some weeks after being taken on they receive *no* wages and have to borrow from the Sirdar, already their creditor to the extent of having paid their travelling expenses and received a commission for having secured them the job. Debts are incurred with the shopkeeper and they learn to fear the stalwart figure of the Kabuli moneylender who waits outside the factory-gate and sometimes actually assaults the workers, if he cannot obtain his money loaned at exorbitant rates. One has to eat, but the food seems horribly dear in the city. Worst of all is the problem of housing, for they cannot continue to live in the street. At last they find some workers from their own district and after the agent has received his due, they are allowed to set up house, but this is worse than the village. There, at least, they had some privacy and the open fields, but here there is incessant noise and they have to share a room with four other families. The tenement is a tall, dark building, swarming with people, ill-lit, evil-smelling beyond belief, and for such questionable accommodation the rent seems terribly high.

Many a time our peasant longs to return home, but he is tied hand and foot; in debt to the Sirdar, in debt to the shopkeeper, he is unable to leave even if he would. He begins to settle down. His wages, once he receives them, seem terribly inadequate and in mysterious ways they seem to diminish. There are fines imposed and cuts made. He is frequently ill and then his position becomes more unbearable than ever. He becomes acquainted with vice in many forms, learns to drink and gamble, but he also learns new



words "Strike" and "*Lal Jhanda*" (red flag). With other workers he hears speeches which excite him and give him new hope. Then, the mills close down; a strike has begun. Week after week it goes on; there is no money; all are in debt. For a time he returns to the village in despair, but the city draws him. Once more he starts work in another mill. He is swallowed up in the great maw of industry. The peasant becomes a proletarian.

This is not an imaginary picture, but fact. Let us fill in the lines. It is always dangerous to generalise. There are mills with adequate welfare-work, which build houses for their workers; municipalities do something; but still these things are the exceptions rather than the rule. The Whitley Commission (Royal Commission on Labour—R.C.L.) says of the jobber that when the labour shortage was acute, overseers and contractors went to distant villages to recruit. Such methods are still employed in certain industries, particularly mining, some seasonal factories and plantations. In perennial industries, thanks to the increase of unemployment and the growing population of the cities, it is now generally possible to recruit labour at the gates.

But the jobber still maintains his position within the factory or mill. Promoted from the ranks, he is essentially an intermediary between the employer and the worker. He supervises the work, and whatever technical knowledge is needed he is expected to impart. To obtain a job, he must be approached and it is upon him that it will depend whether the job is held or even a better one obtained. He may also lend money and find the worker lodgings. He "combines in one person a formidable series of functions" (R.C.L.). He also discharges some of the duties performed by trade-union officials in the West. Thus, he is told to notify the workers of any change in conditions of work, and if the workers have grievances, it is he who may be expected

to inform the employer. It is obvious that a man in such a position will have many temptations. The security of the worker is in his hands, and that he profits financially by the exercise of his power seems to R.C.L. "a fairly general practice." In many cases employers and managers are aware of this evil, but little attempt is made to check it.<sup>1</sup> It is the inevitable result of uneducated and uncontrolled persons being given power. In some cases they extort from the workers a monthly percentage of their wages. Serious abuses are common when women are supervised by male jobbers, and even when a woman is employed for the purpose, she may prove even more rapacious than the man. The continual shifting of the labour population may be partly due to the jobber, for it is to his interest to engage fresh workmen if he gets a commission for doing so and a bribe as well!

It is generally admitted that housing in industrial areas is deplorable. In the village, despite the conditions to which I have referred, there is usually some kind of veranda or enclosure to secure privacy, but the congestion of the great cities, combined with the fact that the workers generally come from the country illiterate, with primitive ideas of hygiene, makes the position shocking indeed. Houses are built eave to eave and back to back, approached by narrow alleys. Rotting garbage and pools of sewage are all too common, while inadequate provision of latrines makes both

<sup>1</sup> "The jobber still continues to be the chief recruiting authority. . . . In Bombay Presidency 135 out of 177 working mills and 12 out of 37 miscellaneous cotton factories other than mills stated that their labour was recruited either through jobbers or through both *mukkadams* and jobbers. A *mukkadam* is a head-man of a gang of unskilled labourers or coolies, whereas a jobber is primarily a chargeman. . . . One mill and seven factories stated that all labour was recruited by the manager. . . . It is practically impossible for a workman to secure employment except through the good offices of a jobber."—*General Wage Census*, Bombay Government, 1924.

The Sassoon group of mills employs a labour officer and the Cawnpore Enquiry Committee are advocating the establishment of a labour bureau with representatives of employers, the unions and the Government.

air and soil polluted. Houses often consist of one small room, unventilated, with a door so low that one has to stoop to enter. To secure privacy, partitions may be put up of old kerosene tins or gunny bags, further restricting the entrance of light and air and increasing the general unsightliness. I well remember the settlement of Harijans near to where I lived in Poona. Mercifully the municipality has now found them dwellings. They lived in hovels made of old tins and rags, none of which could have been more than 3 ft. high. The stench which awaited one as one entered the settlement was worse than anything I have ever known. Or the lines of hovels on either side of a stream of filth which housed the mill-workers of Jalgaon. I visited this during the rains, which made it all the more grim. Here there were more than 200 children and no special arrangements made for their schooling. They were all friendly people, but I have never seen people look more diseased.

In Bombay lack of space has given rise to peculiarly unpleasant tenements—the *chawls*. These may be as much as five stories high. On the top floor it will be difficult for an adult to stand upright. One writer (Cecile Matheson, *Indian Industry*) describes a visit to a small room in which five families lived, one in each corner and one on a table, which formed a kind of second floor. Rooms open out on a long, rambling corridor; the stairways are like ladders; and the buildings are dark and gloomy beyond words. They are built so close to one another that there is little light or air available for the tenants. Sanitary arrangements are totally inadequate. A survey made in 1936 of *chawls* for municipal workers showed that of 1,138 rooms investigated, 227 rooms were occupied by more than 3 adults and children, a total of 1,053 persons being found in them. In 31 of these minute rooms the average number of children per room exceeded five. The trouble is that when relations come to

town to look for work they help to increase the overcrowding. Municipal employees—mostly scavengers—pay a rent of 8 annas a month for men and 5 annas for women. Non-municipal workers have to pay a rent of Rs.2 for a man and R.1 for a woman. Seventy-five per cent. of the population of Bombay live in one-roomed tenements. To visit some of the older *chawls* is a harrowing experience. One is tempted to ask how many of the distinguished visitors to the “Gateway of India” ever penetrate behind its impressive façade. From the heights of Malabar Hill Bombay seems one of the loveliest cities in the world; there is so much that the visitor does not see. The effect on those who live under such conditions must be disastrous and such a way of living is quite alien to the traditions of village India. R.C.L. thinks that many of the *chawls* are impossible to improve and are only fit for demolition.

It is true that some rehousing has been accomplished and there is no doubt that the public conscience is awakened. The Bombay Port Trust built *chawls* to accommodate 3,000 of its workers, and since the War concrete *chawls* with many improvements have been put up in four different centres; but it is a melancholy fact that some of them remain half-empty. The workers are reluctant to live in them. This may be due to the lack of lighting in some of them or the scarcity of shops or police protection—there have been cases of molestation by hooligans in the more lonely spots—and the lack of cheap transport. It is said that rents also have been too high. It is common in Bombay to see hundreds of people sleeping in the streets. These are, by no means all homeless, but are working-people forced to escape from their overcrowded rooms. I have not been able to secure details about housing conditions in Calcutta, but I am told that they are horrible in certain parts. R.C.L. mentions the fact that in Madras city there were 25,000 one-roomed dwellings

housing 150,000 persons or one quarter of the population. But it is just to refer to the admirable housing estate of the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills. Though a certain amount of rehousing has been achieved, conditions in Ahmedabad are equally bad. R.C.L. found that 92 per cent. of the houses were single-roomed.

The Labour Enquiry Committee which has just concluded its labours at Cawnpore dealt with the question of housing in that city, and the Chairman (Professor S. K. Rudra) remarked that his visit to the slums had convinced him that horses and cows were better accommodated, and I agree with him. A report on housing conditions in Cawnpore was published by the Historical and Economic Society of Christ Church College, with the help of a professor. This report revealed, apart from the appalling overcrowding, incredible insanitary conditions. For example, it particularly emphasises the lack of latrines. One evening at 6 p.m. the students counted more than fifty people using a certain piece of ground for purposes of relieving nature. But these places where human beings have to live have to be seen to be believed. I have seen some of the worst slums in Glasgow, London and Leeds, and they are heaven in comparison. The houses owned by the mills are better and a certain amount is being done by the Improvement Trust. But so much more needs to be done! In one ward of the city the density of population per acre is 1,229 persons. In 1931 the average density of population in the Metropolitan Boroughs of London was 59 persons per acre (Southwark was the highest with 152).

In view of such conditions, it is not surprising that the workers soon deteriorate. Till recently, at any rate, drink and opium have been scourges; tuberculosis and venereal diseases are all too common. Malaria and hookworm also help to weaken the general physical standard of the worker.

The women-folk often are left behind and in the great cities there is a marked disparity in the proportion of the sexes. In 1931 there were 475 women to every 1,000 men in Calcutta and its suburbs; in Bombay 553 and Cawnpore 698. But the figures are for the city as a whole; the disparity among the workers only would be higher. That this leads to grave social problems cannot be denied, especially in a tropical country where marriages take place at an early age and family life is cherished. The moral restraints of the village are removed; the result is an increase of disease and prostitution. The worker when he returns to his village tends to introduce disease there also. Again, the worker may have to prepare his own meals. He will take one meal very early before going to work, cold probably, being cooked the previous night, and his main meal in the evening. Conditions in the factory may not be good and are certainly very different from the open-air life of the peasant. In any case, the general standard of living being so low, he will have little vitality to face the strain of heavy manual work.

It is not easy to secure the statistics of death and disease for the working class alone, but, as we have seen, the average expectation of life in India is tragically low. The death-rate for the whole of Bombay is something like 220 per 1,000, but it will be much higher in the working-class areas. I have been told that infantile mortality among the workers is 400 per 1,000, and Freda Utley (*Lancashire and the Far East*) puts the figure as high as 600 per 1,000 in the *chawls*. There is no doubt that the practice of administering opium to infants contributes to the death rate. Little research has been made yet into occupational diseases; and R.C.L. stated that there is need for far more comprehensive Public Health Acts in every province. But, quite apart from the insult to the dignity of man involved in the horrible conditions at which I have only hinted, they have the effect of reducing the efficiency

of the worker and his earning capacity. But here we have a vicious circle. Poverty cuts at the root of ambition, initiative and desire, and leads to bad conditions; bad conditions lead to inefficiency, and inefficiency leads to poverty. Lokanathan (*op. cit.*) gives figures to show that more operatives are needed for a process in India than in any other country, e.g. in the jute mills, two Indians have to do the work that is done by one man in Dundee. In 1928, 131 tons of coal were produced as compared to 250 in Britain and 780 in U.S.A. (in 1926). R.C.L. says that the Indian workman in the iron and steel industry "is not so strong physically, nor has he the stamina to continue work of this nature for so long a period" and "produces less per unit than the worker in any other country claiming to rank as a leading industrial nation." It is clear that not only common justice but industrial wisdom demands an improvement in conditions.

At this point it would be well to turn to the question of hours of work and wages. It is impossible in a general book to be detailed, and India is so large and so varied as to the types of work that any generalisation is difficult and apt to be misleading. I begin by quoting some figures for 1929, but it must be remembered that since then there have been cuts in wages in a number of cases and to-day the cost of living in India, as in England, is rising.

Bombay Presidency is the centre of the textile industry and plenty of figures are available. In 1929 the average wage for twenty-six days a month ranged from Rs.35 to Rs.60 among the weavers. But in Sholapur they were rarely more than Rs.35. The average wage per month for spinners was between Rs.20 and Rs.25. (In S. India the figures are less: Rs.15-20). Women coolies earned between Rs.8-10; reelers and winders, Rs.18-22. (In Madura, in S. India, they were getting 4*d.* a day!) Forewomen earned

Rs.30-35; seven jobbers and head mechanics, Rs.100-120. At that time a Committee in Madras worked out that a minimum wage should be Rs.23, but far more than that would be necessary in Bombay (Rs.30 at the very least). To suggest that a worker should receive 8s. 7½d. a week does not seem an extravagant demand! The Bombay Wage Census of 1934 gives details of later figures. This most informative report points out that there is little or no standardisation of rates in textiles or any other industry in India. Wage rates vary from centre to centre and unit to unit. Furthermore, basic rates are subject to deductions or additions for cuts or increases in rates. There are also possible bonuses in certain cases. Also, there are no universally fixed times for which rates are reckoned. The Report points out that the general effect of a wage-cut in respect of one class of operatives would be the same only if the wage rate of that class were uniform or similar; in all cases a general wage-cut affects the poorly-paid individuals more adversely than those who are better paid. "If the average daily earnings of all adult workers in cotton mills of Bombay City in October, 1934, are compared with the average in the mills selected for the 1926 enquiry it is found that the general reduction in wages as between July, 1926, and October, 1934, was one of 16 per cent."

Broadly speaking, the hours of work in perennial factories is limited to 10 hours daily and 54 per week; and in seasonal factories, 11 hours daily and 60 weekly. The textile mills generally work a 9-hour day. In order to restrict output, the jute mills were working a 40-hour week, but from April 1st they were free to work a 54-hour week. Dockyards, larger engineering shops and most railway workshops work a 48-hour week but the daily hours vary according to the number of hours worked on the short Saturday. No child can be employed for more than 30 hours a week. In the



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mines the daily work underground is 9 hours for a 6-day week. On the railways the Rules of 1931 provide for a 60-hour week for continual work and an 84-hour week for intermittent work. There is no legal restriction on the hours of work of dock labourers. Only a very small percentage of the workers of India get holidays with pay; the Cawnpore Enquiry has recommended them.

But if conditions are often unsatisfactory in the great industries, what are we to say of the smaller and unregulated concerns? There are many concerns employing less than the twenty persons required for status as a factory. R.C.L. says that only too often the buildings are unsuitable and the machinery unguarded. And though lighting is inadequate, night work is carried on. Such small industries have been outside the sphere of operations of the Workmen's Compensation Act. In addition to mechanical defects, such factories lack proper sanitation and conveniences for washing. While the Commission believed that, owing to the nature of the work, the rules as to child labour were not widely contravened, the atmosphere was more akin to the domestic workshop than of the factory proper. But in places where no power is used, and as many as 700 or more may be employed, it is another matter. R.C.L. especially made reference to the mica factories, many of which employ over 800, 30 per cent. being children. Children of from six to ten were being employed cutting mica. In the Punjab, women and children over eight clean wool in a vitiated atmosphere. In the shellac factories of C.P., Behar and Orissa, work is carried on in unsatisfactory buildings with leaky roofs and earthen floors; there is a serious lack of drainage. The Director of Public Health of C.P. referred to the "stinking effluvia from washing basins and drains" as being "disgusting" to those employed in washing the shellac, who have to "stand knee-deep in this water in the pits and carry on the work for

hours together." Children are employed in the stove-room, which must be injurious, owing to the excessive heat.

The making of *bidis* (the indigenous cigarette) results in many abuses. It is carried on in homes and workshops in the bigger towns. The small workshops are often airless boxes or dark semi-basements. In some places the Commissioners found boys of five working for ten or twelve hours for 2 annas, recalling the worst features of child apprenticeship in England before the passing of the first Factory Act. Again, in the carpet-factories of Amritsar young children are employed with no limitation of hours. Conditions in the tanneries were also said to be very bad.

There are a number of mines in India, the chief being manganese and coal. The principal coal-mines are in Chota Nagpur and Bengal. As yet the mines have not reached any great depth and the miner is generally able to stand upright. Most of the mines are free from inflammable gas and many are lit by electricity. In some of the mines ventilation was found unsatisfactory, as was sanitation. The miners get infected with hookworm; in the Asansol area 73 per cent. of the underground workers were infected. Thanks to the surface workings, miners' diseases seem unknown. But the interesting thing about the mines is the manner in which labour is recruited. The main coalfields are adjacent to areas inhabited by aboriginal tribes, and they supply the bulk of the workers. They generally settle down near the mines and devote themselves partly to cultivation. Others come from their villages to work and return to them. Nearly all spend much of their year in agriculture. But the introduction of modern methods is resulting in non-aboriginal workers taking to the mines. The miners are recruited by contractors, and many of them come year after year, but it seems that their hours of work are irregular. Among the miners drink and drugs are a great evil. Hours are long and the

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arrangement of hours leads to evasion. It is worth noting that till 1929 women worked in the mines and will not be finally excluded till July, 1939. The miners are for the most part primitive people and there is grave danger that they may be exploited. As far as I know, there is little or no trade-unionism among them.

The same must be said about the plantations. Here, too, recruitment is generally from rather primitive people and among peasants who are brought from great distances. Conditions will depend very much on the individual planter, as the plantations are in remote parts. Recruits to the plantations used to be indentured, but at different times the rules of contract have been revised, and since 1926 no labourer in Assam can be criminally punished for breach of contract. Many of the coolies are given small plots of land and thus are agriculturalists as well as workers. I have heard of serious abuses of power on plantations in more than one part by the *kamgani* or contractor and the general evils of "jobbery" seem common. There is little control of the planters and they possess an almost feudal power over their employees. Above all, it must be remembered that in Assam particularly the workers are so far from their homes that it is well-nigh impossible for them to leave. But in some cases they are recruited for a fixed term of years and repatriated. It is essential that in all cases the right of repatriation should be granted. Wages would seem to be very low, but there are gifts in kind as well and land; but exploitation is always possible and there is no one to prevent it. Any kind of organisation of the plantation workers would be frowned upon and indeed it would be impossible for a trade-union organiser to gain access to the plantations.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Director of Public Health of Punjab writes in reference to the 1,500 load coolies of Simla that most of them lived in one room, low and unventilated; sometimes fifteen or twenty people all huddled together on the floor. Cooking was done in the same room.

I have not attempted anything but a superficial survey of Indian labour, but it is enough to show the great variety of occupation and the need for the protection of the workers. For the most part, the Indian worker is still closely in touch with the land; he is still more than half a peasant, though M. N. Roy goes too far when he suggests that there is no proletariat in India. Sometimes brothers will take in turns to work in a factory and till the soil. The general illiteracy makes it easy to exploit Indian labour and the problem of improving its conditions is no easy one. At this point we may turn to some consideration of trade unions and factory legislation.

## 2

We have seen how the peasant is lured to the town. Often he stays there to increase his meagre income and becomes a semi-permanent town-dweller. Up to almost the end of the nineteenth century there was no State Control over Industry in India. Employers were free to exploit the workers to the full. Hours were excessive, wages were very low; there was no regulation of age or any legislation to safeguard the workers from injury. The first Factory Act was passed in 1881. This limited the employment of children and provided for the fencing of machinery. It threw the burden of inspection on the District Officer who neither had the time nor the knowledge for the work.

The Act virtually became a dead letter.

In 1882 after a boy of fifteen was killed in a mill by being entangled in a cog-wheel after working fourteen hours, including the whole night, an Englishman was employed to study conditions and to make a report. Among other things, he reported that women were employed for long periods for twenty-three hours a day. The wage was 3 or 4 annas a day

for sixteen hours. Employers put up great opposition to any further legislation. Large meetings of textile workers in Bombay demanded better conditions. It is significant that more than forty or fifty years had to elapse before one of their demands—compensation for injuries—was granted. A memorandum on conditions in factories was submitted to the Chief Inspector of Factories in England and it makes harrowing reading. Most factories worked from sunrise to sundown, including Sundays. Conditions were generally bad.

The next Factory Act was passed in 1891. It is noteworthy that, apart from the mass meetings of workmen in the 'eighties, Labour raised no voice of protest up to the beginning of the twentieth century. There was no channel through which grievances might be ventilated, and the strike as a weapon of defence was unknown. If there were a dispute and men downed tools, the employer had unfettered power to replace them by blackleg labour. It was a paradise for the exploiter.

The introduction of electricity into factories and the ravages of the great epidemic of plague in Bombay in 1896 led to a great increase in working hours. Some mills actually worked their operatives for continuous stretches of fifteen to twenty hours and in Bombay there were actual auctions of workers at street corners. But the plague also resulted in a thinning of the ranks of agricultural labour and their wages improved. Thus, there was less need to go to the town for work. The city workers began to feel more independent and class-conscious. They were no longer ready to submit to the old conditions. Disputes, more or less organised, began to take place and there was a general all-round improvement in wages.

From 1891 to 1911 there was no further factory legislation. It was a period of expansion and vast industrial development.

Labour was scarce and, while hours remained terribly long, it began to be to the interest of employers to improve conditions. On September 24th, 1905, at a huge meeting in Bombay, the demand was made for a twelve-hour day. A Committee was appointed to make a survey of hours of work and conditions and in 1907 a Labour Commission was appointed. A Factories Act was finally passed in 1911, though it met with considerable opposition. It was described by one organisation as "revolutionary, dangerous, and unnecessary"!

The Great War resulted in a great development of Indian industry. Imports were restricted owing to the fact that British ships had been commandeered for the transport of troops and materials. All countries were demanding raw materials. It led to a vast increase in Indian capitalism as opposed to British capital invested in India. Factories sprung up like mushrooms and there was a great demand for labour. While there was a tendency to revert to the bad old days of long hours, the worker was no longer so inarticulate; he demanded and secured better wages. That the employers were making huge profits was obvious to him. Prices were rising also and the workers could not live on the prevailing rates. Strikes occurred, mostly unorganised, and there was so great a pressure on industry that they were generally successful, in so far as the employers were reluctant to have the machines slow down, and so made concessions. But because they feared that the workers would demand a continuance of the same conditions after the War, they resorted to the device of making wage increases in the form of dearness allowances over the rates of 1914, which in many places are still adhered to. Though wages were higher in 1916 than before the War, the real wages in relation to the cost of living were often lower than in the pre-War year.

The evil housing conditions to which I have referred

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were if anything worse at this period. Employers in India seem to have been more callous than anywhere else; they resented demands for improvement in conditions; their main concern was dividends. Indian capitalism has always seemed to be the system at its worst and it was in a way decadent before it ever had time to develop.

The influenza epidemic of 1918 was responsible in India for a death roll of over 8 millions and, contrary to expectations, prices rose more sharply than ever before. The capitalists had made phenomenal profits; thirteen large jute mills in Bengal alone paid dividends of 200 per cent. and over for the year 1918. There were large funds available for investment. Hectic building activity took place. The influenza epidemic had thinned the ranks of labour and the demand was greater than ever. Wages lagged behind prices and real wages became appallingly low. The year 1919 saw the outbreak of industrial strife on an unprecedented scale. The workers could have by this time gained great concessions, but they were submissive, and, if they found conditions too unbearable merely returned to the country, but now prices were so high that it became impossible to live and still the employers were unwilling to make concessions, even though they could well afford to do so. While trade unions were still virtually unknown, the workers began to learn that they could achieve something by concerted action. Strike committees were formed and strikes met with success. These committees formed themselves into trade unions, chiefly concerned with wage increases and reduction of hours.

Demobilisation and the shutting of munitions factories led to many who had spent their war-time savings seeking re-employment, but production began to ease off as stocks accumulated. Unemployment began to loom large. By this time employers were willing to reduce hours. In 1921

the Government of Bombay created a Labour Office and in 1922 the Factory Act was amended. But by 1924 the full effects of the industrial depression began to be felt in India. In 1923 the Ahmedabad mill-owners made the first organised attempt at a general wage-cut, and this resulted in the largest strike that had occurred in that city. It lasted two months and involved 45,000 workpeople. In 1924 the Bombay mill-owners decided to withdraw the annual wage bonus which they had been paying since 1918. The workers struck and stayed out for three months. They succeeded in maintaining the existing rates after a further strike in the following year.

In 1926 the Government passed a Trade Union Act, which compelled all unions to register and to submit their accounts. This Act was amended in 1928. At the same time it is worth pointing out that up to this time a trade union was liable to be prosecuted; the Act at least recognised their existence. 1928 saw a great wave of strikes all over the country: railwaymen on different lines, steel-workers, workers in jute and textiles.

But it was in 1929 that the workers of India attained a degree of militancy hitherto unknown. The influence of the Left Wing had been growing. The decision of the owners to "rationalise" had provoked a strike in Bombay in 1928 which led to the growth of the Girni Kamgar (Red) Union. The strike actually lasted for six months and resulted in the appointment of the Fawcett Committee to enquire into the whole question of rationalisation. During this struggle the Union recruited as many as 65,000 members. Revolutionary slogans began to appear on the workers' banners. It was a great moral victory for the Left. But the Government was greatly alarmed. The Trades Disputes Act penalised sympathetic strikes and those "designed to coerce the Government." It forbade the transference of money



from one union to another and the cessation from work of those engaged in public utility services, unless fourteen days' notice was given in writing.

The Public Safety Bill of 1928 had empowered the Government to confiscate funds from abroad and to deport undesirable Englishmen. It was twice rejected by the Assembly and finally had to be certified by the Viceroy. While the Debate was in progress prominent Left Wingers were rounded up and thirty-one of them were charged with "conspiracy to deprive the King of the Sovereignty of India." These were kept in jail at Meerut for four years, including three Englishmen. In the end, one died in prison, twenty-six were sentenced either to transportation for life or sentences varying from three years upwards; three were acquitted. On appeal, sentences were reduced and some were released. The trial received wide publicity and evoked the solidarity of Labour all over the world. The nature of the charge led to the accused making long speeches to elucidate their principles. I well remember seeing youths carefully cutting out the reports from the papers and pasting them into books. It was their first textbook of Socialism! The Fawcett Committee in its report considered the demands of the workers and agreed that the prevalent conditions should not be varied to the disadvantage of the workers and that rates should be fixed by consultation with the workers' representatives and that there should be no victimisation.

In many of the strikes that took place at this time the police resorted to firing. Despite the arrest of leaders, others sprang up and on May 1st, 100,000 workers gathered at Chowpatty Sands in Bombay. In a short time nearly all the unions were in the hands of the Left. The cotton and oil strikes in Bombay were complicated by the outbreak of serious communal riots. This time of unrest was due to an

accumulation of grievances. As the very moderate writer of the section on Labour in the *Indian Year Book* says: "The employers were still thinking in terms of comparison with the levels of the pre-war years and not from the point of view of their sufficiency for the maintenance of a decent standard of life." The Government attempted to meet the growing agitation by the appointment of a Royal Commission. This was led by the late Hon. J. H. Whitley and it was boycotted by most of the unionists. Further strikes took place in 1929, but at the end of the year, when the T.U.C. met at Nagpur under the presidency of Jawarhalal Nehru, resolutions were passed to boycott the Commission and to affiliate to the League against Imperialism, but the moderate section, led by Mr. N. M. Joshi and others, broke away to form the National Federation. In 1931 there was a further split at the Calcutta Session of the T.U.C., and the extreme left wing broke away to form the All-India Red T.U.C.

The period from 1930 to 1934 was a somewhat depressing one for Labour, though one must not omit mention of the great G.I.P. Railway strike of 1932. There was much sectarianism and the unions were divided. The movement was at a low ebb and there was considerable repression. In 1933 the non-Communist unions joined with the Communist unions. In 1935 the two wings of the T.U.C. composed their differences and it was agreed that the parent body should represent the working class of India. In the same year a joint committee of the T.U.C. and the National Federation was set up to explore the possibilities of common action. The T.U.C. also entered into an agreement for joint action with the Congress Socialist Party. The worst days were over and the T.U.C. has increased its prestige; unity is the order of the day. In order to bring the picture up to date one may refer to the fact that in the spring of

1938 unity has been achieved between the T.U.C. and the National Federation, though the T.U.C. has had to make concessions, including the abandonment of the hammer and sickle on the red flag!

There has undoubtedly been closer co-operation between the workers and the Congress during the last few years. This is largely due to Pandit Nehru, who at the Lucknow Congress in 1936 espoused the cause of the National Front and invited the workers' and peasants' unions to make common cause with the Congress for the freedom of the country. We have already referred to the widespread wage-cuts in the period up to 1933. In 1934 the Bombay Labour Office made its comprehensive enquiry into wages from which we have quoted. The Trades Dispute Conciliation Act provided for the appointment of a Labour Officer in Bombay and a Chief Conciliator, but Mr. Shiva Rao, a moderate T.U. leader, has remarked (in *India Analysed*) that the Act was good on paper, but the rules were so complicated that weeks would have to elapse before a union could satisfy them. In 1934 also the Factory Act was amended, following some of the recommendations of the Whitley Commission.

Since 1935 there has been an increasing tendency for Government intervention in labour disputes. The Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association (also called the Majoor Mahajan), under the guidance of Mr. Gandhi, never joined either the T.U.C. or the National Federation, and is committed to the principle of arbitration. As we shall see, the Congress ministries are tending to adopt this policy. The Leftists condemn the Ahmedabad union as class-collaborationist, but it claims to have achieved substantial benefits for the workers and has developed extensive welfare schemes. I discussed the question as to whether the Majoor Mahajan was in a sense a "company union" with Pandit

Nehru, and he said that it was unfair to label it thus. He said that it was the strongest union in the country, with more than 30,000 permanent members. Its constitution was democratic and it elected a Council, one member of which represents every 100 workers, and from this an executive is chosen. Its leader, Gulzarilal Nanda, he said, knew more about labour than any man in India, but he admitted that his new Bill, which is being discussed in Bombay, would cause bitter dissension. It provides for such elaborate machinery for conciliation that it would be at least four months before a strike could take place, should the owners not accept the decision of the arbitrator. A strike before this would result in the leaders being severely penalised. But, as we shall see, many union leaders feel that they must have the right to proclaim lightning strikes. Of course, there are many features in the Bill which will be welcomed. But great dissatisfaction is expressed with the clause that forbids a strike unless the union represents a membership of 20 per cent. of the total workers. Nehru added that he thought that trade unions were still very weak, and that many of them were little more than *ad hoc* strike committees. He said that Bombay Labour, despite its militancy, was organisationally very weak because of endless ideological disputes among its leaders. It is certainly difficult to achieve unity between those who believe in class struggle and those who believe in class collaboration.

This very inadequate summary gives no idea of the heroic struggles of the Indian working class. Faced with every kind of difficulty—intimidation, espionage, *agents-provocateurs*—there are endless complications and dangers. The full repressive powers of Government have been used to quell disputes, and the workers are so desperately poor that they cannot make contributions, and therefore they receive no strike pay.

Yet they have been known to stay on strike for as long as six months.<sup>1</sup>

The workers were encouraged by the growth of radicalism within the Congress, and when the Congress took office last year they gladly welcomed it. There is no doubt that the Congress ministries have granted more facilities for agitation than existed previously, but the workers are by no means satisfied.

The Congress Election Manifesto stated that "in regard to

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Shiva Rao in *India Analysed*, speaks very feelingly of the difficulties of unionism. Despite the Acts, the Government frequently "watch developments" and content themselves with sending for police reserves. They have often helped the employer by arresting, harassing or imprisoning the "ringleaders" and "agitators." An organiser is a "fomenter of mischief." An employer professes himself in sympathy with legal unions so long as there is no outsider on the executive, though the Law permits it. An executive with workers only on it is soon broken, for the organisers find themselves out of work, though the reasons given may be plausible. The difficulties have been immense. "We hold our public meetings of the workers . . . after dark so as to make the task of identification as difficult as possible for the agents of the employer. The only light is the dim lantern of the police reporter, without whom no workers' meeting in India takes place. Every word . . . is reported to the higher authorities. . . . The police also may be present . . . and the police superintendent . . . discusses with (the manager) the rights and wrongs of the strike. 'Before so-and-so came and talked to my men, there was never any trouble; life is just impossible now.' . . . It is terrible and nerve-racking to see a strike or lock-out through. . . . Attempted negotiations meet with the response: 'I prefer to deal with my men direct and desire no outside assistance.' . . . If I am enjoying anyone's hospitality (usually a poor man who is anxious to do his bit for the workers), a hint is conveyed to him that, unless he gets rid of his guest, there will be trouble; and that is sufficient. . . . For the first two weeks all is more or less well; but as the dispute goes on, with no sign of ending, anxiety begins to reveal itself on the face of the workers. At the end of four weeks privations become acute, but no one will dare to suggest a return to work. There are, of course, no relief funds worth the name, and employers' spies and police informers are everywhere. . . . It is impossible not to feel a profound respect for such fine traits of character and to wonder why, if human nature be really frail, it does not break down under an intolerable sense of strain." Mr. Shiva Rao comes from the south, and the Madras Government was characterised by the R.C.L. as more reactionary than any they had come across in India.

It will be interesting to see what changes will take place in labour policy under the Congress Ministry in this province. It is worth re-emphasising that Mr. Shiva Rao is a moderate with little use for "Reds." The whole section of his chapter in *India Analysed* is worth reading, though Leftists will not care for it. He concludes by saying that Indian Nationalists will soon have a day of reckoning after the establishment of self-government in India, "unless they have ready for execution a far-reaching programme for the emancipation of the workers."

industrial workers, the policy of the Congress is to secure for them a standard of living, hours of work and conditions of labour . . . suitable machinery for the settlement of disputes between employers and workmen, protection against the economic consequences of old age, sickness and unemployment and the right to strike for the protection of their interests." This policy, despite a certain vagueness, was hailed by the workers, and they looked forward to these demands being implemented. The Working Committee of February, 1937, endorsed the specific demands and instructed Congress Members to work for "eight-hour day for industrial workers, living wage, and unemployment relief." After the Congress took office, Babu Rajendra Prasad said: "So long as Congress is not in full power it must adopt the line of ameliorative programme . . . to embark on a radical programme till that power is achieved is hazardous. It will introduce class conflicts which would be harmful to the national movement in more ways than one." Some see in this statement a departure from previous assurances and a failure to realise the inherent conflict in existing class relationships.

But the strike wave mounted higher and higher. There was a general strike in Cawnpore of 40,000 workers and the slogan of the general strike was raised in almost every industrial town. The Bombay Government came out with a declaration of its labour policy, pledging itself to carry out the Congress programme, "using all the means at their disposal," but nothing very positive was done. Later the Cabinet appointed an Enquiry Committee.

The Labour Sub-Committee of the Working Committee of the Congress met at Wardha in September, 1937, and stressed the urgent need of a uniform labour policy. In October a joint conference of this committee and Congress Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries of Labour met at

Calcutta. It fixed the following items for a programme of work and asked that "administrative or legislative action" should be taken as early as possible in the following year. The items were:

(1) Collection of statistics. (2) Extension of Factory Acts to unregulated establishments and their stricter enforcement in seasonal factories. (3) Maternity benefit for a period of not less than eight weeks. (4) An enquiry into the question of adequate wages in organised factories. (5) Labour exchanges. (6) Leave with pay. (7) Minimum wage-fixing machinery. (8) Machinery for the settlement of disputes. (9) Housing of labour. (10) Scaling down of debts. (11) Holidays with pay. (12) Employment insurance. (13) Conditions for State aid to industries in regard to treatment of labour. Other resolutions were passed for consideration; e.g. the liberation of those communities living under conditions of semi-serfdom, relief to landless labourers during periods of seasonal unemployment, enquiry into the condition of mining and plantation workers, wages of women, improvement of the condition of sweepers, and facilities for education of the labourers.

The Presidents of the Kisan Sabhas and the A.I.T.U.C. were invited to be present. The T.U.C. found the results of the conference disappointing, and its charter of workers' demands was endorsed by a rally of over 100,000 workers. Promises do not make a labour programme for action. How to implement promises is the insistent question. Says the Mahatma's Boswell in *Harijan*: "It is for the Congress to lay down policies, not for individuals or groups to dictate by threat or show of force." Mr. Bhulabhai Desai also said in the course of a speech that "we should make every effort to bring about a reconciliation between capital and labour." Labour leaders profess to have no desire to force the idea of class struggle on the Congress, but merely to ask that they should fulfil their programme of democratic rights.

It is inevitable that the Cabinet should be pulled in two directions—by the employers, who will hold them back from fulfilling their promises because of the threat to their profits, and the workers, who demand redress. The memorandum of the Bombay Government promised no reduction of wages without adequate enquiry, but labour leaders maintain that this is not the issue, but restoration of cuts and increased wages in a boom period. The “living wage” of the Election Manifesto is replaced by the “minimum wage” in the memorandum, and the joint conference merely uses the phrase “wage-fixing machinery.” A minimum wage must be worked out in relation to the average budget of a working-class family. The owners, under cover of what “the industry can bear,” “competition,” and “differing costs of production,” press for different minimum wages in different centres and for different categories of work.

Labour leaders accuse them of demanding legalisation of low wages and peace in industry at any price. They are afraid of lightning strikes and desire the wheels of industry to run smoothly in a time of boom. “Machinery for the settlement of disputes” is sometimes construed as a form of compulsory arbitration under the Law, in the sense that the employers before a lock-out and the workers before a strike will have to submit their demands to arbitration before taking action, though the award may not be compulsorily binding on either. The workers are assured that arbitration will not affect their right to strike. But the vital question is: Should lightning strikes be banned? It is urged that in India trade unions are more in the nature of committees which can not successfully intervene in a dispute as do the mighty unions in the democratic countries. Lightning strikes are an effective means of securing rights before the owners have had an opportunity of demoralising the workers by victimising the militants. The owners, on their side, insist that such



strikes often break out for frivolous reasons and are ruinous to the industry.

Trade unionists also criticise the phrase in the Bombay memorandum which refers to "provision of *alternative* occupations in periods of *inevitable* unemployment." They think this phrase sinister, suggesting that employers are preparing for rationalisation, which would mean "inevitable" unemployment. There is also the question of what would be the wages of these "alternative" occupations? They fear labour camps *à la* Hitler. "3 annas earned in the cottage industry was, any day, better than 12 annas in the slum area," said the Parliamentary Secretary in the *Bombay Chronicle*.

Two Enquiry Committees have sat in Bombay and Cawnpore and have made their reports; both advocate wage increases, and the Cawnpore Report has been vehemently criticised by the employers, who accuse it of having been unduly influenced by the union. Among other things, it advocates holidays with pay, labour bureaux and the recognition of the union after being reconstituted.

It is desirable that legislative measures should be inspired by the workers' representatives. The owners dread having to deal with the organised and collective might of their employees instead of with helpless individuals. The bureaucracy was accustomed to make a distinction between "genuine unions and red organisations." The Bombay memorandum refers to "genuine" unions, and the Calcutta conference laid down as a basis for State recognition the acceptance of the policy of "using peaceful and legitimate means." But many unionists object to such qualifications and demand the recognition of all duly registered unions.

The Left has criticised the action of the ministries during the strikes. Firing was resorted to in Cawnpore, and Section 144 of the Police Code has been applied to labour leaders. In Bombay and Sholapur police action was used against

demonstrators. Apologists refer to violence on the part of the strikers and add that repression would have been worse under former ministries! Increasingly it is being said that the strikes were instigated to discredit the Congress ministries, but strikes do not occur at will; they are, as we have seen, a world phenomenon due to the increase in production through the enormous increase in armaments and the consequent rise in prices and profits. One may compare the wave of strikes in France after the coming of the Popular Front Government. The Leftists say that they called for a United Front and could not possibly be parties to discrediting the Congress. It is interesting that since the general strike in Cawnpore the Muslim Leaguers have accused the "Reds" of having become the agents of the Congress Government! It was not a Communist, but the highly respected President of the City Congress Committee, who led a demonstration of protest when the labour leaders were arrested. He is not even a member of the Socialist Party. There has been very real distress in Congress circles in regard to the way in which strikes have been handled. In Cawnpore, union meetings have been held to ask the workers to keep quiet till the Report should be published; interested persons, however, have been urging the workers to strike!

Nehru said in his Presidential Address at Lucknow that "the Congress has always laid stress . . . on the forging of sanctions to enforce the people's will. To this end it has carried on activities outside the legislatures." But to-day the Ministers object to extra-parliamentary activities as embarrassing their task, and beg the workers to organise, but not to launch struggles and to leave it to them to obtain them justice.

Gandhi, in an article entitled "Storm Signals" (in *Harijan*), referred to "forces of disorder," and called for a "purging" of the Congress. But, in all fairness, it must be said that he

severely criticised the ministries, saying that unless they could maintain peace without violence they should resign. "If in spite of honest effort by Congressmen, forces of disorder cannot be brought under control without the assistance of the police and the military, in my opinion, acceptance of office loses all force and meaning and the sooner the ministers are withdrawn the better it would be for the Congress and its struggle to achieve complete independence." It is worth noting that he speaks also of the "exaggerated expectations" of the workers.

Soon after this the Gandhi Seva Sangh, a select body of the Mahatma's disciples, met at Wardha and decided that "it is necessary to serve the industrial workers in an organised manner under the auspices of the Gandhi Seva Sangh," calling for funds and the training of workers. The policy of starting "Gandhi" unions as rivals to the T.U.C., with its policy of "class-war," was frankly enunciated by Sardar Patel in a speech at the conference of the Gandhi Seva Sangh in Behar early this year. There is little doubt that what has been up till now a social service organisation will have increasing political significance. Gandhi himself dislikes the ideology of trade unionism in India and regards it as a foreign importation. Nehru writes that "the workers and their leaders know well that the Congress Ministers are friendly to them and wish to help them in every way. Circumstances beyond their control may prevent them to-day from going as far as they would like to. But for the first time in its history the workers' movement has friendly provincial governments in six provinces and the chances of remedying some of its ills and developing its strength and organisation. They will injure their own cause by embarrassing them and withholding their co-operation from them" (written, September, 1937).

Are the workers too impatient, or are their leaders right

in seeing their struggles as a forging of mass sanctions against Imperialism? Certainly in Cawnpore a real unity has been achieved between Congress and the workers. So much so that the *Pioneer* has been insistently warning the Ministers of U.P. to strike at the dangerous revolutionaries in their midst. Similarly, the Liberals (cf. for example the *Leader* of Allahabad) have been warning the Congress against any alliance with revolutionaries with Russian sympathies. Great pressure is being put upon the ministries to abandon their friends and to serve the employing class.

That labour conflicts can be easily solved or that the Ministers will have an easy task in trying to appease irreconcilable opposites is in the highest degree improbable. The working-class movement will continue to grow, and the development of literacy will greatly assist it. Much depends upon unity, discipline, greater organisational activity and the wisdom of the comparatively young men who guide the destinies of the Labour movement. Recent events in Cawnpore have shown that the youthful union workers can display great discretion and restraint.

That there is still a degree of sectionalism within the unions may be granted. Perhaps the greatest hope will lie in the appearance of leaders out of the ranks of labour itself—Indian Ben Tillets and Tom Manns!

## NOTE

Since these pages were written, the Employers' Association of Cawnpore have sent a memorandum to the U.P. Government, expressing their inability to accept the findings of the Enquiry Committee. They say that it will kill the industry and they have threatened to close their mills (and even remove to one of the states). They accuse the Committee of having been unduly influenced by the Union and of being weighted heavily in favour

of labour in its personnel. They consider that the prosperity of the industry has been exaggerated by the Committee, and that its proposals would put an additional burden on the industry which would wipe out all its profits. The result of this, they add, would be to throw out of work some 36,000 workers. They accept the principle of standardisation of wages and would be prepared to consider a minimum wage, if it were universal to all industries and applied all over India. They refuse to recognise and facilitate the efforts of any workers' organisation which is "permeated with Communistic ideas." As regards labour statistics, housing, indebtedness and allied problems, they consider that these can best be tackled by Government and local bodies.

Despite evidence to the contrary, which they question, the employers deny that there have been wage cuts since 1929 or that wages are lower in Cawnpore than in Bombay, on the basis that the cost of living and housing is lower than in Bombay. They regard the demand for holidays with pay and sick-leave allowances as "impracticable." As regards the Union, they are only prepared to recognise it if it is "non-political" and "purged" of communist elements.

Leftists and moderates in the Union desired to hold the workers in leash till the Government had made a reply, but the workers would not be checked and the strike committees got to work. Now, some 42,000 workers are out. This general strike has features which differentiate it from the strike of last year and, indeed, any previous labour disputes. It has been in progress now for more than four weeks and it has been strictly disciplined and non-violent. The method of *satyagraha* has been used, pickets lying in the road, according to the best Gandhian technique, and, what is still more remarkable, the Congress both in the city and in the whole of U.P. has thrown itself into the support of the workers. Congress volunteers have been enlisted—mostly from the middle class—to help the pickets, and gifts in money and kind are being collected from all over the province. The Provincial Congress Committee passed a strong resolution supporting the strikers. Among other things it said that "the workers of Cawnpore are fighting, not only for themselves, but for the entire working class of India. They are fighting for human rights, and every Congressman must sympathise with them and wish them success. The P.C.C. therefore calls upon all Congress Committees and the

public generally to give every assistance to the strikers in the great struggle that they have begun."

Before leaving for Europe on June 2nd, Pandit Nehru expressed his sympathy with the strikers, though criticising the fact that the Union had displayed a certain weakness in that the strike had been started against their will at that particular moment. He says, however: "The eyes of workers all over the country are on you, as the strike will determine not only your destiny, but theirs also. To a great extent, Congressmen throughout the country are also watching your struggle, as they know it will also react on the country's fight for freedom. . . . I appeal to the people of Cawnpore and the whole province to help the strikers."

There are something like 3,000 "Red" volunteers enlisted, women and children joining in the struggle. Pandit Balkrishna Sharma, President of the City Congress, pledged his support and, as the Left Wing paper, *National Front*, accurately puts it, the Congress Committee has given more help than any Congress Committee has ever done before. From the very beginning its participation has been "solemnly fraternal and entirely business-like." Congress volunteers have been working side by side with "Red" volunteers and ward committees have been humming with activity—organising relief, collecting grain, running food kitchens. Even the Muslim League has played its part, and on May 29th there was a complete *hartal* (cessation of work) in the city and 25,000 citizens attended the evening demonstration. Congress flags waved side by side with the workers' red flag and the green flag of the Muslims. Pandit Sharma said with some pride that the Cawnpore Congress Committee had "written a new chapter in Congress history," and the President of the T.U.C. wrote to him that "you are making history by giving an example to the whole country of how to establish unity between workers and the Congress."

One Communist leader, I am told, remarked that he regretted having attacked the Gandhians for eight years, for they were proving themselves loyal comrades in a working-class struggle. On the other hand, the Congress and people generally, believing in non-violence, have been struck by the disciplined non-violence of the workers.

The U.P. Government have now published a resolution on the Enquiry Committee's Report and the workers have accepted it.

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The resolution is moderately worded, but it makes it clear that the Employers' attitude is regarded as unhelpful in that they not only refused to provide certain valuable data which the Committee had the right to demand, but also went out of their way to suggest that the Committee was biased. The main points of the Resolution are: Need for a graded rise from 10-12 per cent. in wages; the recognition of the Mazdoor Sabha, provided that it undertakes constitutional changes to make it a disciplined and responsible body; proposals to establish a wage-fixing board and a Labour Commissioner.

The *Hindustan Times* remarks that, considering that the dividends paid by the Cawnpore mills on paid-up capital are much better than in other parts of the country, that production has increased by more than 100 per cent. in Cawnpore between 1929 and 1937, that wages in Bombay and Ahmedabad are certainly higher and that the price of cotton has fallen and that of cloth risen in these years, the Cawnpore employers can afford to do something for their workers. This paper, which is pro-Congress but in no way socialistic, hastens to add that it is not animated by any anti-capitalist bias and points out that the resolution does not leave out of consideration the need for a prosperous industry, and adds that "the confidence of the captains of industry and of the financiers in the conduct of affairs should not be impaired."

The Congress Government in U.P., at any rate, is beginning to have to face the problem which awaits all "New Dealers" and sincere democrats, viz. that class divisions are only too real. Events of the last few weeks show that there is a tendency on the part of the industrialists to make a common front with the landlords against the Congress. The situation in Cawnpore shows clearly that the old idea that the Congress is entirely a weapon in the hands of the capitalist class is by no means correct. It is a genuinely democratic, anti-imperialist party faced with just those contradictions which face all democratic parties throughout the world.<sup>1</sup>

July 1938.

<sup>1</sup> The dispute in Cawnpore was settled after almost twelve months' strife by an agreement on the whole favourable to the workers.

## CHAPTER THREE

### BABU

*"Servitude is the soul blinded. Can you picture to yourself a man voluntarily blind? This terrible thing exists. There are willing slaves. A smile in irons! Can anything be more hideous? He who is not free is not a man; he who is not free has no sight; no knowledge, no discernment, no growth, no comprehension, no will, no faith, no love."*

VICTOR HUGO

#### I

THE TITLE OF THIS CHAPTER may be misleading, for the word *babu* has a variety of meanings. It generally evokes hoary chestnuts such as are bandied about the European clubs concerning *babu English*. The "Bengali Babu" belongs to the same category as the stage curate and the comedian's mother-in-law. The word seems originally to have been used of the old aristocracy of Bengal. It came to have a meaning equivalent to the eighteenth-century "masher" or dandy. It was also used as an honorific title for petty rajahs, i.e. the Babu of —.

Bengal followed Surat and Madras as the main centre of Indian commerce and it produced wealthy merchants, who were also called "Babu." When the East India Company came upon the scene these "Babus" became compradores and middlemen. Gradually the word came to lose its dignity and was applied to the clerks of the Company, coming to signify "pen-pusher." Perhaps we may be allowed to use the word also in the sense that Julien Benda uses the word "clerk," a literate, an intellectual.

As elsewhere, so in India, the middle class is by no means homogeneous; the history of the word *babu* is illuminating.



The merchants and petty aristocracy of Bengal reached a point at which no further economic development was open to them. Many had been ruined by British rule, while a number had through the permanent settlement become land-minded and formed a new landlord class. The rest, finding themselves frustrated, turned to mysticism and later to revolution. Bengal has always been the home of religious sentiment, e.g. the sinister mysteries of the Tantric system and the ecstatic devotion of Chaitanya. But Bengal also was the first province in India to feel the full impact of Western education. I have referred elsewhere to Macaulay's dislike of Indian culture. He believed quite sincerely that before the "brilliant light" of Western philosophy all Indian thought would grow pale and vanish out of existence. "No Hindu," he wrote, "who ever received an English education remains sincerely attached to his religion"—a remark which is largely true, though it has generally meant the loss of the old moorings and a help-less drifting along the waters of scepticism and semi-ignorance, overwhelmed by the sudden impact of Western systems incapable of harmonisation with the existing social conventions. "It is my firm belief," said the dogmatic Macaulay, "that if our plans of education are followed up, there will not be a single idolater among the respectable classes of Bengal thirty years hence. And this will be effected without any effort to proselytise, without the smallest interference with their religious liberty; merely by the natural operation of knowledge and reflection."

It has been said that for Macaulay "all religious difficulties in India could be solved by the principles of Whig Latitudinarianism." The early pioneers really felt that this diffusion of Western knowledge would ensure for India "vast moral blessings." For the great missionary pioneers like Duff and Carey, Western education was only a means

to an end. But, as Mayhew<sup>1</sup> sums it up, "on such a road Western literature and science were but sign-posts. Only the infallible chart provided in the Bible could save travellers from the useless and perhaps dangerous deviations." This fairly well represents the position of the Anglicists. Macaulay wished "to make the Indians more English than the English themselves." The educated Indians were to be "English in taste, opinions, morals and intellect."

But an important consequence of Macaulay's policy seems to have escaped the notice of the Anglicists. Sir Henry Craik remarked that the common use of the English tongue "will sap more than anything else the security of our hold in India. It is one of the chief incentives to a certain class of natives to acquire facility in our tongue, that by so doing they can interpose between the higher officials and the mass of the people."

The Education Minute was a momentous affair. It was decided to open the portals of Western learning to a people who, in the words of Burke, were "for ages civilised and cultivated by all the arts of polished life while we were yet in the woods." But unfortunately the educational reforms were more concerned with the substitution of Western ideas than their judicious assimilation. There were some who thought that English literature and culture would assume the same proportions in India as did the Græco-Roman influence in Gaul, Spain and, through the Normans, England. But it is worth noting that Latin enriched English, it did not destroy it.

English as a substitute for indigenous literature was doomed to failure, but its consequences were of the greatest importance. It produced an unending stream of clerks for the insatiable bureaucracy, it assisted the material development of the country and, above all, it stimulated the

<sup>1</sup> *The Education of India.*

awakening of political consciousness, but it did much also to emasculate the intellect of one of the most subtle and intelligent of races. Prinsep and other exponents of the "orientalist" school fought hard for freedom of study and the use of the vernacular, but they were discomfited.

The pouring of the new wine into the old skins was a dangerous experiment, and much that was valuable was lost in the process. At first it led to a mere aping of all that was English and then by reaction to a justification of anything that was Indian. Both these extremes were unhealthy. But English gave a fresh viewpoint and in many ways stimulated vernacular literature. This is especially true in Bengal, where the Bengali language was refreshed and developed in a remarkable way. Much praise is due to the early missionaries, such as Carey and Marshman, who introduced printing and greatly stimulated the study of Bengali. The effect on religion was also significant. Ram Mohun Roy endeavoured to harmonise Indian and English conceptions, and this led to the establishment of the Brahmo Samaj. In Western India it led to a considerable development of social reform.

But as long as there was mere imitation little that was of value could emerge. It was when men turned to a re-valuation of the past in the light of the new ideas that things began to happen. In Bengal a rich literature developed; in art and literature and music the Tagore school blazed a trail. Bankim Chandra Chatterji, the Scott of Bengal, was the first of a distinguished line of novelists; it was from one of his novels that the Congress took its national anthem, "Vande Mātaram." He set the new note of nationalism that was to become a mighty chord. But the vernaculars are only slowly recovering from their neglect and, despite the very effective grasp of English on the part of many Indians, it cannot be said that they have

made any very great contribution to *English* literature. Bengali friends have told me that it is unfair to judge Tagore as a poet by his English translations, even though they are his own. Most of the finest vernacular literature has not been translated and much of it defies translation.

Bengalis were not only influenced by English; I am told that the influence of the great Russians—Dostoievsky, Gogol and others—was considerable. To those who seem to think that Bengal consists of clerks and terrorists, it would be a revelation to meet some of the distinguished coteries of literary folk in Calcutta to-day. They speak with assurance of the development of writing in England. We discussed the poetry of Auden and Dymont; others were interested in Louis Aragon and tendencies in France. This group produces a critical review in Bengali, not unlike the *Criterion*. I have no doubt that the same can be said of other parts of India, though I fancy that much of their art and literature is derived from Bengal.

The artists and writers have ceased to be imitative and are becoming creative, but one great weakness remains. Art and literature have been divorced from the language of the common people. The idiom, influenced by English with Sanskrit or Persian affinities, tends to be exotic and isolated. Even in the Tagore school there may be an element of preciosity. Though writers in Bengal have not carried "art for art's sake" to the limits which it reached in England and France at the end of the nineteenth century, it is often a real danger. Indian literature is still concerned with personal emotions and reactions, it has not on the whole been related to the life of the people. Perhaps in the crude ballads and folk-songs of the peasantry the literature of the future may have its most fruitful stimulus. The development of vernacular education and the efforts that are being made by such men as Gandhi and Nehru to

evolve a simple Hindustani free of both Sanskrit and Persian elaborations as an all-Indian idiom must have profound effects in the future.

The worst result of the Anglicising of Indian education has been the production of a large number of half-educated clerks to whom education has been merely a means to a Government job. Indian universities have been divorced from their real function of research and culture and made into forcing-houses and machines. It is true that such universities as Calcutta and Allahabad—to mention but two—are producing men of great talent, but the great mass of educational establishments tend to be philistine and not even up-to-date. I have been told of many lecturers who have never revised the notes which they drone out to generations of bored students. There is a terrible amount of learning by rote. The tutorial system is still undeveloped. Large classes and tired teachers have done great harm. On the whole, there is a lack of co-operation between teacher and taught. It is tragic that in a country where traditionally education has been an intimate relation between *guru* and *chela*, mass production in education has been the order of the day. Mayhew describes the traditional scheme of education as lofty and inspiring, resembling in some respects the educational dreams of Plato. From the age of eight a Brahmin boy had to pass fourteen years away from home under a *guru*. This ideal has been revived at Hardwar by the Arya Samaj. This *Gurukul* is a most impressive institution. I was told there of one youth who had written a thesis on a modern economic subject in Sanskrit. This had been translated into German and gained him a Ph.D. at, I think, Heidelberg. (This was in pre-Hitler days!) There are beginning to be many exponents of progressive education. I was greatly impressed by Mr. Nanabhai, who conducts an educational experiment on the most progressive lines in

Bhavnagar State. Dakshinamurti, as it is called, is a place to visit.

Tagore's university, Visva-Bharati, is an institution of which no country would be ashamed. The national schools and universities which the Congress, under Gandhian influence, have promoted may not have attained a high degree of scholarship, but they have given young men an opportunity to avoid the merely "servile" approach to foreign culture and they have inculcated a useful spirit of discipline.

One of the great weaknesses of the Indian university is the lack of any coherent philosophy. I do not mean that there are not distinguished philosophers within their gates, but they do not send out men into the world with a clear purpose and an adequate critical faculty. So many Indian students, in comparison with those in other countries, seem adolescent and rather half-baked! But I am confident that things will be very different in the future and, even now, India can produce fine scholars of whom any land might be proud. She could produce far more if education were not so much concerned with making Government servants. Facilities for adequate research and the publication of the results thereof are still too scanty. But worst of all is the lack of the fullest freedom for discussion and criticism. For many years the Government has regarded "dangerous thoughts" with almost as much suspicion as the authorities in Japan. For instance, even to-day it is hard to obtain books on Marxism. Many of John Strachey's books are banned and any book with the word "communism" in the title may be stopped. Professor Berdyaev's *Origins of Russian Communism*—a scholarly volume somewhat anti-Bolshevik in tone—was stopped, as was also a bitter attack on Communism by a British Fascist called the *Spectre of Communism*! The vagaries of the Censor (or rather the operation of the Sea Customs Act) are

strange indeed. Many volumes of Mr. Gollancz's Left Book Club are stopped, its paper is banned and it is impossible to get the *Labour Monthly*.

One misses the small groups and clubs which play so great a part in the life of an English university, though they are to be found in some cases. Students have to study in a language not their own and are enslaved and crushed by the tyrannies of the examination system.<sup>1</sup> The intensity of their study and neglect of sport in some cases leads to serious illness. Students in India are faced with many difficulties. They are often terribly poor; in many places the hostel accommodation is bad and the appalling state of affairs revealed by the Sadler Commission is by no means a thing of the past. The physical condition of students still leaves much to be desired, though be it said that often the Indian has a magnificent physique and takes pride in keeping up the old traditional exercises. Miss Mayo's picture of decadent Hindu manhood is a libel. Indians are often slight in stature, but lithe and muscular. But youth labours under a sense of strain and only too often his memories of college life are not as pleasant as they should be.

Grievances about examinations, high fees and the lack of freedom of speech are increasingly being voiced, and in the last year there has been an epidemic of student strikes. I was recently asked whether I did not think that the relation of teacher to pupil was not that of exploiter to exploited! During the Civil Disobedience Movement students were encouraged to leave their colleges, and for many years past politics has almost been an obsession with them, but this is not to be wondered at in a country where they can have limited responsibility and where middle-class unemployment is an ever-increasing problem.

<sup>1</sup> It seems absurd that Indians should have to read Chaucer or study the classical allusions and theological intricacies of Milton.

But it cannot be denied that there have been occasions when students have been made cannon-fodder in the battles of rival politicians. To-day the most intelligent students seem to be turning increasingly to Socialism, especially to Marxism. They are finding their inspiration in the work of students in China; they eagerly read of the part played by students in Spain, and they are often more international in outlook than their elders. That their zeal sometimes runs away with them is not surprising, and there is a tendency to utter slogans without the background of careful study. Again, the students are often quarrelsome. I myself have had to quell a free-fight between two rival factions on one occasion. There is still lack of discipline in student organisations and a good deal of suspicion of the *bonâ fides* of their leaders in some cases. But now there is a growing tendency to organise the youth, to improve their status as students, to protect their interests and to participate in all constructive work. It is being widely realised that the educated youth have a great responsibility to the illiterate. There is talk in certain provinces of conscripting the youth for some years of national service in education. The Bombay Students Federation has devised a scheme for the summer vacation—a literacy campaign. After training, groups of students will go to the villages and, besides giving instruction, they will stimulate the efforts of the villages, teaching them elementary hygiene and simple games. They will also try to get a set questionnaire filled in, thus acquainting themselves with the actual conditions of the people in that district. It seems an excellent scheme, and one hopes that it will be taken up in other parts of the country also. The Chinese students in the present crisis of their national life are playing an important rôle in the unification of their country, and there is no reason why Indian students should not do likewise.

Education in India has been far too much under



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Government control, and this has only too often led to lack of enterprise and a certain standardisation. Students also have regarded education as a means to a job, as something purely utilitarian, and this has resulted in cramming. There is much talk to-day of vocational training, but in a sense Indian education has been far *too* "vocational." It has served a small professional class of would-be officials, lawyers, clerks and doctors. The disastrous "filtration" theory which had set forth the ideal that by educating an élite, the new learning would gradually percolate to the masses, as drops of water from the Himalayas gradually form a mighty stream to irrigate the parched plains, has proved a failure.

To-day Gandhi and others are considering the problem of mass education. Many will be critical of the Wardha Scheme,<sup>1</sup> but the conception of an education which revolves round a chosen craft is admirable and the experts who have worked out the syllabus have produced something which is well worth study. The scheme will demand a large number of well-trained teachers if it is to be a success.

One of the deplorable weaknesses of Indian education has been the neglect of women. It is not true to say that women have taken a lowly place in Hindu society. Indian history tells of many noble women, some of them learned and some leaders of the people, but women fell on evil days in India. To-day their education still lags behind. The result is that the atmosphere of the home is penetrated with ideas quite other than those of the school. Women are often more conservative than men, and the lack of education has made this especially true in India. There is an alarming gap between the guiding ideas of Indian youth and their home circle. This is true all over the world, but perhaps it is more obvious in India than elsewhere. Young men who revolt from the old ways have to conform out of deference to their mothers or

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Syllabus published by the Zakir Hussain Committee.

grandmothers, and where the joint-family system survives, the old ladies have a surprising influence! But one must emphasise again the problem of unemployment. It is doubtful whether there is any country where the youth are more frustrated than they are in India. I heard recently of a graduate of one of India's greatest universities having to accept a job as fireman on the railway, and only too many have to eat out their hearts in the most monotonous clerking on inadequate wages. It is difficult to find any figures of unemployment in India, but they are very considerable. That young men, under these conditions, have at times resorted to terrorism is not so surprising.

## 2

"Swaraj is my birthright" (B. G. Tilak). We must now turn to the political significance of the middle class. It is impossible here to give a detailed account of Indian nationalism; all that one can do is to point out some important landmarks and to give some idea of its development. We have seen something of the effects of English education. It created a ferment in the middle class which at first seemed religious in character. It led to the demand for the abolition of *sati* and other social abuses which had grown up through the centuries. That remarkable genius, the Eurasian Derozio, who was one of the founders of modern Bengali literature and who died in his twenties, proclaimed a gospel of rationalism mixed with Christianity which was heady wine to the Hindu youth. But the movement away from Hinduism was counteracted by the reform movements.

Ram Mohun Roy had attempted a synthesis and his successor, Keshab Chander Sen, went farther than anyone in the assimilation of Hinduism to Christianity, though in his later days he seemed to have reverted somewhat to a more Hindu

mode of thought. "Maharshi" Tagore,<sup>1</sup> by his learning and great piety, consolidated the Brahmo Samaj, but a more aggressive form of Hinduism was required and it found its prophets in Dayanand, the founder of the Arya Samaj, and Vivekanand, the St. Paul of the Ramakrishna Movement. For both of these religion was bound up with love of country, and the rehabilitation of Hinduism seemed a prerequisite for the New India. Lala Lajpat Rai, the great Punjab nationalist, was an Arya Samajist, and till to-day the Congress in North India has considerable Arya elements within it, though this is not calculated to endear it to the Muslims or Christians!

But the study of English not only led to reform movements. The political philosophy of nineteenth-century England also had its effect. Indians began to feel that they had a right to share in the administration of their country. In 1885 the Englishman Hume founded the Congress to provide a platform for these new aspirations. The first President, Mr. W. C. Bonnerji, referred to the "consolidation of those sentiments of national unity that had their origin in our beloved Lord Ripon's reign."<sup>2</sup> At the beginning it was purely moderate in character, encouraging social reform and looking for its inspiration to British Liberalism. For many years it only touched a tiny minority of educated men. Acharya Kripalani, in his *Gandhian Way*, rather unkindly describes it as "a yearly assemblage of learned and ambitious lawyers" who "indulged in eloquence after the pattern of Burke, Sheridan and Gladstone, alternately denouncing and blessing their foreign masters whose creations they were." They believed that if they spoke loud and long they would get what they desired. They had a "pathetic" faith in British democracy. But as they became more critical the Government took fright and in 1892 forbade Government servants to join the Congress.

<sup>1</sup> Father of Rabindranath.

<sup>2</sup> He sent his wife to England, that his sons might be Englishmen born!

Just as the move towards Christianity led to the emergence of a new and aggressive Hinduism, determined both to purify and justify the ancient traditions and culture, so also men appeared who were not content to beg for crumbs at the white man's table. The Congress became divided into moderates and extremists, or nationalists. These tendencies concentrated in two great leaders: Gokhale, whom Gandhi has called his political *guru*, and Tilak. Gokhale was through and through a liberal, a great reformer, founder of the Servants of India Society and associated with men like Ranade and the men of the Deccan Education Society. He was anxious to work with sympathetic Englishmen and did not envisage anything further than a degree of self-government within the Empire.

Tilak welded together the orthodox Hindus and the younger men who were dissatisfied with the moderates. He started the cult of the Mahratta warrior Shivaji, who had driven out the Muslims, and he turned to the *Bhagavadgita* as a gospel of disinterested action. He revived the old gymnastic societies and the festival of the elephant-god Ganesh as a rallying point for the nationalists. Tilak has often been accused of combining political extremism with social conservatism, but it is not easy to distinguish between the use of traditional ideas as a vehicle for new political doctrines and an obscurantist faith in them. But it is hard to forget that Tilak first came into prominence over agitation against the raising of the age of consent and that he supported an attack on Government servants who were taking certain measures, such as the killing of rats to deal with plague, as being hostile to the Hindu religion. This led to the killing of a plague officer and the subsequent arrest of Tilak.

In Bengal also the extremists reverted to the cult of the bloodthirsty goddess Kali as a basis for their movement,

and here it was definitely terrorist in character. Bepin Chandra Pal and Aurobindo Ghose led the movement for "direct action" and the youths resorted to the bomb and the pistol. The impoverished *bhadra lok* (the petty *rentier* class) easily fell for this type of propaganda. Books on Russian Nihilism were read avidly, and there can be little doubt that anarchism, of the Bakunin brand was very influential. Secret societies were founded and raids made to secure funds.<sup>1</sup> It is all a little reminiscent of pre-Soviet Russia. Curzon's policy of partitioning Bengal was like a match set to a keg of gunpowder. Terrorism increased and the boycott of foreign goods was begun. This *swadeshi* movement has gone on ever since and led to the support of the nationalists by the Indian industrialists. World events were beginning to affect India. The whole of Asia was stirred by the Japanese victory over Russia and the Russian Revolution of 1905. The Turkish Empire was also breaking up. Nationalism became more conscious of itself and less provincial. Curzon's policy made it possible for the two wings of the Congress to make common cause for a time, but in 1907, at the Surat session, the Congress split and the nationalists went out. The period of agitation from 1905 onwards led to the "Minto-Morley Reforms" but they came too late to satisfy anyone, though the period from 1911 onwards was somewhat quieter. The extremists did not regain their influence till after the death of Gokhale in 1914 and the release of Tilak in the same year. After two years of retirement, he started the Home Rule League with Mrs. Besant. This captured the Congress in 1917.

The War period was very significant for India. Her troops had fought successively for the Allies all over the world and

<sup>1</sup> The total number of outrages were few compared with other countries. The young terrorists were careless of their lives and gained popular sympathy, though no general acceptance of their methods. They even spread to London, where Sir C. Wyllie was assassinated in 1909.

the soldiers returned to their villages with vital new experiences. The War dealt the death-blow to the purely imitative or liberal relation to the West. Again, as we have seen in Chapter Two, there was a great increase in industrial development during the War years and great profits were made. The Indian capitalists emerged from the War a powerful class which could not be neglected. During the War a large proportion of the British Army and many of the civilians had had to leave Indian shores. Indians had a far greater control of their country than at any time since the advent of the British. When the War ended, the troops returned and the civilians; they took it for granted that the old Anglo-Indian life would go on as usual but they signally failed to realise the new spirit that was abroad.

It is worth remarking that just as the period of agitation after 1905 led to reforms, so the post-War years led to the "Montford Reforms," but again they came too late and were not adequate. India expected that self-government would be the reward for her War services, but she was doomed to disappointment. After the visit to India of Mr. Secretary Montagu, the reforms were published. The system of dyarchy satisfied nobody. It was doomed to failure. This complicated arrangement of checks and balances gave the right of discussion with no responsibility. It put a premium on irritation. Again and again, Government Bills have been thrown out with no one to speak a good word for them, and the Viceroy has certified them. Mrs. Besant urged that the Reforms should be worked.

But a new planet had come into the Congress firmament. M. K. Gandhi had not hitherto played any part in Indian affairs, though he had gained the respect of his fellow-countrymen on account of his campaign in South Africa. Tilak was dead; Mrs. Besant no longer militant. There was an open field for a new leader.

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The passing of the Rowlatt Acts in 1919, which gave powers of internment or trial without jury, led to Gandhi's declaring that non-co-operation should be resorted to. There were outbreaks of popular feeling in many parts of the country. Rioting in the Punjab and the killing of some Europeans led to the establishment of Martial Law. In Amritsar a crowd, many of whom were village men and women and children come in to the city for a festival, disobeyed an order and assembled for a meeting in a narrow place called Jallianwala Bagh, bounded on three sides by high walls. On their refusing to disperse, General Dyer gave the order to fire: 1,605 rounds were fired. Armoured cars were stationed outside; the people were unarmed and hopelessly trapped: 370 were killed and at least 1,200 wounded. The troops were not molested. The wounded were left unattended. The next day at Gujranwala bombs were dropped on rioters and a machine-gun used. A veritable reign of terror began. Floggings were common; people were maltreated unless they "salaamed" any European whom they might meet, and all who had occasion to pass down the street where the English woman Miss Sherwood was molested were made to *crawl*. Students were forced to report themselves to the police daily, having to walk miles in the burning heat.

I single out this horrible affair because in a way it had almost as disastrous an effect as the Mutiny. "The shadow of Amritsar lengthened over the fair face of India" (the Duke of Connaught). For some time the full account of what had happened was not known, but gradually it leaked out, to the disgust and rage of the whole country. Rabin-dranath Tagore gave up his knighthood and Gandhi returned his medals, denouncing the government as "satanic."

The Hunter Commission condemned Dyer. His admission

that he had shot down an unarmed crowd as a "moral example" shocked people. It was described as a "measure which could not conceivably have been employed in any part of the 'white' Empire—even in Ireland." Bitterness in India was intensified when it was seen that Dyer was supported by a large section of the Press, many M.P.'s and the overwhelming majority of the House of Lords. He was retired from the Service and given a pension. Gandhi was able to carry on agitation with general support. The Muslims had been disgruntled because of the fact that England had fought and conquered the Turks, an Islamic power, and the agitation over the Khilafat led to their making common cause with the Congress.<sup>1</sup> Khilafat committees were set up all over the country and for some years those stalwarts, the Ali brothers, took their place in the Councils of the Congress and in the jails. But many have pointed out that this alliance had its weaknesses. When, some years later, the Khilafat collapsed and a national State came into being in Turkey under the leadership of Kemal Pasha, the committees lost their significance and many Muslims joined the sectarian Muslim League, which was revived and strengthened.

During the visit of the Prince of Wales in 1921 there were riots, and the Chauri-Chaura episode of 1922, when some policemen were attacked and burnt within their station, led to Gandhi announcing that he had committed a "Himalayan blunder" and calling off the campaign, to the indignation and dismay of most of his followers. This first non-co-operation movement had taken various forms. It included the boycott of foreign cloth, the beginnings of the *khadi* movement, the boycott of the Courts by lawyers—many of the greatest and richest lawyers gave up their careers for good, notably C. R. Das, Motilal Nehru, and

<sup>1</sup> Cf. also Chapter Six, p. 168.



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Rajendra Prasad—and the boycott of educational establishments, as well as, of course, the boycott of the Legislatures.

During the course of the movement there were risings all over the country. Civil disobedience was strongest in Bengal, but no province was without it, and the crisis was intensified by the movement of the Akali Sikhs in Punjab, the No-Tax campaign in the Midnapore District of Bengal and the serious rebellion of the Moplahs in South India. Outside India, the Sinn Fein movement had been largely successful, and in Egypt the Wafdist Party seemed strong. The Viceroy desired to make a settlement with the Congress and Pandit Malaviya was sent to interview Das in jail. Gandhi had promised *Swaraj* in a year and the year was nearly up. A settlement would seem a great victory, but Gandhi could not accept the terms of agreement till it was too late. By the end of 1921 almost all the leaders, with the exception of the Mahatma, were in prison.

The collapse of the Khilafat and the decision to abandon non-co-operation after Chauri-Chaura greatly reduced Gandhi's popularity, and Lord Reading seized the opportunity to have him arrested. The trial was a historic event and the Indian Christian K. T. Paul compared it to the trial of Christ before Pilate. The Mahatma described himself as a farmer and weaver and explained the process which had turned him from a loyal friend of British Rule to a seditionist and non-co-operator. He was sentenced by Mr. Justice Broomfield<sup>1</sup> to six years' imprisonment, though he was actually released after one year. At this point the Congress virtually split for a time. Das and Motilal Nehru desired to enter the Legislatures with a view to obstruction; the disciples of Gandhi were against it. The dissentients formed the Swarajist Party and the rest were known as "no-changers," but a compromise was reached and the

<sup>1</sup> The Judge expressed his distress at having to sentence.

Swarajists were allowed to contest the elections with remarkable success. The Swarajist Party was closely-knit and disciplined—a kind of Parliamentary Radical Party.

From 1924 to 1925 Das dominates the scene. A brilliant man, he had succeeded in welding together the growing Left, which was dissatisfied with Gandhian leadership, and the moderates who were inclined to Constitutional activities. After his release, Gandhi concentrated on the *khadi* campaign, and he was allowed to start the All-India Spinners Association with its own funds, while the Swaraj Party was to carry on as an autonomous body. Thus peace was established within the Congress. In 1924 a Unity Conference was held at Delhi which was largely attended—even the Anglican Metropolitan was present—and Gandhi embarked on a three weeks' fast. A formula was devised for promoting unity, but, in spite of the very real success of the Conference, there were meagre practical results.

There were rumours that Das was negotiating with the Government. He seems to have had great hopes of Lord Birkenhead, and a pronouncement of his on India was awaited eagerly, but in June, 1925, Das died, and Birkenhead's speech was colourless. Das was a pure politician and his death left no one who would dare dispute the leadership of Gandhi.

Das's death weakened the Swarajist Party and there were some who wished to weaken its policy of undiluted opposition. In the end the Maharashtrians from Poona broke away to form the Responsivist Party.

In 1925 Mr. Vithalbai Patel became President of the Assembly. A brilliant lawyer and a man of somewhat malicious turn of mind, he not only upheld the dignity of the House, but revealed the futility of the dyarchic scheme. The appointment of the "all-white" Simon Commission provoked a storm. It was boycotted and received with black

flags wherever it went. Even the Liberals were solid in refusing to co-operate with it. The publication of Miss Mayo's *Mother India* increased the bitterness in India and did much to poison the minds of the English. The inevitable effect of reading this "drain-inspector's report," as Gandhi called it, was to conclude that such a people were certainly unfit to rule themselves. Most Indians believe that it was written for the purpose. There was also a recrudescence of terrorism. The young men of the Punjab were feeling their way to revolutionary socialism. The tempo of the country was increasing.

In 1928 Gandhi returned to politics. At the Lahore Congress in 1929 he warned the Viceroy that unless *Swaraj* was conferred by the end of the year he would have recourse to civil disobedience. The history of the Civil Disobedience Movement is recent enough to obviate any description of it. It was the nearest approach to a mass movement that India has yet seen; it mobilised the lower middle class and elements among the peasantry. But the working class stood aloof under Communist leadership, and Gandhi was attacked as an agent of the *bourgeoisie*.

It was the same error which led to the dubbing of the Social Democrats of Germany as "Social Fascists." The result has been that the new policy of the National United Front has been hindered by the fact that the Socialists took little part in the old campaigns and the veterans of the Non-Co-operation Movement still have a great hold over the people. On the other hand, the Congress has not always realised what struggles were involved in organising the workers, and it cannot be denied that the mill-owners of Ahmedabad were supplying the Congress with funds. The Congress has throughout its history been admittedly a middle-class body, but under Gandhian leadership it has organised itself and gained a following such as was unknown in its past.

Another significant fact is the awakening of the women. They played a great part in the Civil Disobedience Movement. Saffron-clad ladies, used to the sheltered life of the Hindu aristocracy or of the wealthy Parsees of Bombay, picketed drink-shops and cloth-shops, led processions, were beaten and flung into jail, Nehru, in his autobiography, describes how his frail mother was beaten. Many women came out of *pardah* for the first time and never went back. To-day they are taking part in public life as never before. The U.P. has a woman minister and an obscure Congress woman ~~became~~ one of the leading Liberals at the polls during the elections. A young Muslim lady of good family is secretary of the Coolies Union in a northern city. Two of the leading Socialists are women. All this may be said to date from the Non-Co-operation Movement.

It was moving to be in India at that time—sometimes tragic, often not a little comic. I remember seeing a fat police sergeant trying to stop a small boy selling *Congress Bulletins*. Again and again the urchin would dive under his legs and shout from behind his back, *Congress Bulletin*. The poor man would swing round, but too late, and then the comedy repeated itself. The poor man got hotter and hotter, till finally he gave up the chase. Then there were the Akhali Sikhs—tall warriors with swords, but pledged to non-violence. They were determined not to surrender their flag. Down came the lathi on their heads with a sickening thud; they fell. Others took their place. At last the inner circle of their women-folk alone remained, but this was too much for the police—they kept their flag.

These are just two incidents which have stuck in my mind from those strange days. There was something very impressive about the Satyagrahis. It was a war, but on the whole a bloodless one. I recall a slim Gujarati girl who had been badly beaten remarking that, as Someone else had said,

"Father, forgive them," so must she!<sup>1</sup> When Gandhi was arrested on his way to make salt, the nationalist papers had a headline from St. Mark's Gospel: "And they came and took him secretly by night"! For many the movement was a discipline and a catharsis. It restored self-respect, but the leaders were all in jail.

In England the first Round Table Conference had been sitting, with its strange assortment of princes and Government nominees. Some of its members may have had relatives, even wives in the conflict, beaten or in jail while they sat in St. James's Palace. At last the Viceroy released Gandhi and a truce was arranged. At the Karachi session of the Congress he was bitterly attacked for calling off the movement. The hanging of a popular youth, Bhagat Singh, for a bomb outrage in Delhi had infuriated the younger Congressmen, but Gandhi's diplomacy prevailed. Bhagat Singh's father was made to speak and implored the young men to remain non-violent and follow Gandhi.

Gandhi elected his working committee and they decided that he alone should go to the second Round Table Conference to represent the Congress. In London he was front-page news. On the whole one cannot feel that his visit was a success, though he made many friends. He was unable to achieve anything at the Conference, and its later sessions were overshadowed by the 1931 crisis and the General Election.

During the movement martial law had been declared at Peshawar and soldiers of the Gharhwal Regiment who had refused to fire on a crowd had been sent to the Andaman Islands. Abdul Ghaffar Khan had organised the Khudai Khitmagars, or "Servants of God," on strictly non-violent lines. Their rust-coloured jackets had given them the name

<sup>1</sup> But there was nothing sentimental about the Satyagrahis. The struggle was grim and disciplined, but it was conducted at a high level.

of "Red-shirts"; many of the English papers imagined they were Bolsheviks, which they were certainly not. This movement among the Pathans on the Frontier province frightened the Government and it was ruthlessly repressed. Special police were brought in and a virtual reign of terror begun.

The deplorable conditions of the peasantry in U.P., to which I have referred, led to a no-rent campaign, while the continuance of terrorism in Bengal had resulted in the promulgation by the new Viceroy of special ordinances of the most comprehensive kind. It was to these conditions that Gandhi returned; the truce was over. He had not been back long before he was once more behind prison walls. At last the country was weary and crushed. In 1934, after his fast, Gandhi was released from jail. It looked as if the Congress was considerably weakened.

The cause of Gandhi's fast has been rather misunderstood in the West. Many have thought that he was protesting against the Untouchables getting certain rights under the new Constitution, whereas his intention was to get them accepted within the Hindu fold without any distinction. By labelling them "depressed class," or something else, the evil would be perpetuated. The whole country was horrified by this "fast unto death" and, under stress of emotion, temples were opened to the Untouchables and inter-dining took place. Finally, a compromise was reached and the Poona Pact ratified. This made considerable concessions and was not liked by the Sanatanists (orthodox).

Old Pandit Malaviya, the President-elect of the banned 1933 session of the Congress, had said that there were at an estimate nearly 120,000 persons, including several thousands of women and quite a number of children, in prison during the previous fifteen months. The Government had hoped to crush the Congress within six weeks, but fifteen months had not sufficed nor would twice the period. This was the

view of one of the oldest and most moderate of the Congressmen. Despite the lack of preparedness, the arrest of leaders and the stopping of finances, it cannot be said that the movement was really waning. Gandhi's fast had created a diversion. But the day after his release he had declared that civil disobedience should be suspended. Congressmen were inclined to revolt, but dared not, owing to the precarious state of the Mahatma's health. On the other hand, the Government refused to suspend the ordinances or to release the civil disobedience prisoners. The Viceroy refused to see Gandhi and it was decided to resume "individual disobedience," with the result that a few more hundreds and Gandhi himself returned to prison.

Gandhi found that the facilities provided for him to carry on his untouchability work were inadequate and he began another fast. It is difficult not to feel that this was not a form of coercion very near to the hunger-strike which he has generally condemned. Once more he was released, but announced that he would regard himself as a prisoner without the walls and not resume civil disobedience till August, 1934. He expressed his belief that the Congress had become corrupt, and orders were issued to dissolve all Congress organisations! At this moment Nehru was released, but was once more clapped into jail after four months. No one seemed willing to tackle the situation. The Congress apparently had collapsed. Civil disobedience was dead. It was decided that the Congress should contest the Elections and the Mahatma himself agreed, but the newly formed Congress Socialist party opposed it.

This Party expressed the growing radicalism of elements of the middle class and the increasing disillusion with Gandhian leadership. A number of Hindus, discontented with the Communal Award, formed the Congress Nationalist Party. At the Bombay Congress, Gandhi announced his

retirement and his determination to concentrate on questions of untouchability and village industries. He succeeded in getting the Constitution of the Congress amended in what some felt to be a less democratic direction. One of his most persistent critics, Mr. Nariman, was removed from the Working Committee and has since, after a bitter controversy, been virtually driven out of Congress politics.<sup>1</sup> Pandit Jawarhalal Nehru conducted a whirlwind election campaign. By rail, road and air he traversed the country with a new and stimulating emphasis on the economic needs of the people. He put the Indian situation within the world context and related it to the struggle against Fascism. This came out very clearly in his Presidential Address at the Lucknow Congress in 1935.

There were many in Europe who prophesied the final eclipse of Gandhi and saw in Nehru the Indian Lenin. He has often been described as a Communist. All this is quite inept. Nehru is a sincere democrat<sup>2</sup> with a great leaning towards Socialism, but he has never joined the Congress Socialist Party or faltered in his loyalty to Gandhi and his colleagues of the Working Committee. His head may be with Marx, but his heart is with Gandhi. He has constantly been faced with a conflict of loyalties and this may have had the effect of making him at times vacillating. He liked and trusted by the Muslims more than any other Congress leader, but the youth who once worshipped him to-day are more critical. At the moment the Muslim League is violently attacking him.

The opponents of the Congress were surprised by its resounding success at the polls. In almost every province

<sup>1</sup> He was at one time Mayor of Bombay and a leading figure. He was accused of mismanaging the elections. After a Congress Enquiry last year, his condemnation was maintained, but he still has many friends.

<sup>2</sup> One clever Indian friend calls him the "last of the Liberals." He would not like the description!



except Bengal and the Punjab, where communal problems were acute, it gained large majorities. The Liberals were swamped and the old non-Brahmin Justice Party of Madras virtually disappeared. The Socialists and Nehru himself were strongly opposed to the Congress taking office after its victory, believing that it would weaken the opposition to imperialism and lead to an increasing dependence upon constitutional parliamentary action. But Gandhi is said to have believed that it was the only alternative to bloody revolution. Despite Nehru's antagonism, he won the day.

This marks the Mahatma's return to public life. His influence has never been greater than it is to-day. Though he is not even a "4-anna member" of the Congress, he is virtually Dictator. He is the "High Command" and nothing is done without his advice being sought.

Congress ministries were formed in seven provinces and, later, in the North-West Frontier Province, with Abdul Ghaffar Khan's brother as Prime Minister. Now it is likely that a coalition ministry may be formed in Assam and possibly in Bengal, while in Sind the Ministry to-day is closely allied to the Congress. Outstanding Congressmen of the second line accepted portfolios and, behind them, co-ordinating and guiding, was the Working Committee with its Parliamentary Sub-Committee. But the power behind the throne is that of the Mahatma in his remote village. Here he lives with his disciples; it is at once a place of pilgrimage and a council house. I remember staying there during the Rains, when the roads were impassable even for bullock carts. Notwithstanding, there was a steady stream of visitors. Despite age and ill-health, Gandhi has never been more influential. He has recently been called in to deal with the question of political prisoners in Bengal. When the Ministers of Bihar and U.P. resigned because they were not given freedom to release the prisoners in

their provinces, Gandhi did not permit the matter to become an All-India issue as many hoped that he would do. He persuaded the Congress at the Haripura Session in February to accept a cautious resolution which left the door open. It is always his policy to leave the onus of decision on his opponents. If they accept his position he is glad; if they do not it can make a good *casus belli*. Like all good generals, he is glad to "keep his powder dry," though he is often accused of playing into the hands of his opponents by apparent magnanimity.<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note that in this case the Viceroy found that there was no politician opposed to the Congress who was ready to form a ministry in either of the provinces, and the Congress Ministers returned with enhanced prestige.

## 3

"What Hitler has done with the sword, I have done with the soul," Gandhi has said. My plan in this book has been to look at the broad groupings in India to-day, rather than to write of leading personalities. One may safely leave the latter to John Gunther! It is true that great personalities make history, but only because they are able to seize hold of given situations and to utilise them, to assess the actual forces available at any one time. It is, however, impossible to conclude this chapter on the middle class without attempting some analysis of the influence and significance of Mahatma Gandhi, who has dominated the Indian scene for well-nigh twenty years. During the ascendancy of the Swaraj Party, he seems to have retired into the background, and again in 1934. In both cases prophets assured us that he was a "back-number" and in both cases he staged a triumphant "come-back."

<sup>1</sup> His political strategy is a kind of jiu-jitsu!

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It is illuminating to compare the various estimates of his role. They are so contradictory. In India it is hard to be critical, because of the extraordinary prestige which Gandhi has gained. For millions he is almost a god; indeed, some believe him to be an incarnation of Rama or Krishna. The peasants of Champaran, after his acquittal in a magistrate's court, were convinced that he had been miraculously plucked out of the court by an angel! To criticise Gandhi is for many paramount to blasphemy. Since the death of C. R. Das no politician has been strong enough to resist him. But we must not shrink from the task of honest evaluation.

Acharya Kripalani, in *The Gandhian Way*, tries to show that Gandhi is in reality a supreme revolutionary who does what is possible and eschews what is merely romantic, but Kripalani himself is profoundly influenced by a hatred and suspicion of Western industrialism and any ideal of collectivism. He tries to show that Gandhi has realised that the struggle for freedom can only be conducted on a basis of not immediately antagonising the commercial and capitalist interests, by using handicrafts as a provisional programme till freedom is attained, and by rigorously adhering to the principles of "truth and non-violence," which are not only ethically right, but politically realistic in a disarmed country faced with all the might of Empire.

Romain Rolland has written a noble study of Gandhi as one of the major prophets and, for many sincere people all over the world, Gandhi is a rallying-point and a battle-cry. I do not know how far he has influenced Aldous Huxley, but his insistence that only "pure" means can achieve satisfactory ends is central in the Gandhian way. But it is impossible here to discuss the philosophy of non-violence.

On the other hand, Socialists and Communists have tended to view Gandhi with suspicion or active dislike.

Mr. Soumyendranath Tagore has written a devastating critique of him in French. Mr. Hutchinson, in his survey of the national struggle in *Empire of the Nabobs*, adopts a similar position. It is interesting that Mr. Subash Bose, now President of the Congress and presumably a loyal henchman of the Mahatma, was very critical of his tactics in his book, *The Indian Struggle*, written in 1934.

The Socialist critics accuse Gandhi of almost cynically exploiting the superstitions of the people, and of being an agent of the Indian *bourgeoisie*. They point out the manner in which he has repeatedly called off his campaigns in the name of non-violence when they appeared to be becoming mass revolutionary struggles. They refer to his justification of caste and cow protection and his belief in co-operation between workers and employers. They accuse him, moreover, of having more than once betrayed the peasantry.

Edward Thompson, from another angle, regards Gandhi as a saint who marred his sanctity by getting involved in politics, of which he made a muddle. But Thompson is always cantankerous about the Congress.

It is quite clear from such contradictory statements that Gandhi is a very much more complex character than either his critics or his admirers allow. His thought is often paradoxical and confused.<sup>1</sup>

Without adding to the heat of the controversy, there are some points that I may make from personal observation and wide discussion with many workers within the Congress. Not even Soumyen Tagore denies the immense personal charm of Gandhi. There is something candid and childlike about him which is deeply moving. When with him it is difficult to resist him. He puts his cards on the table and is honest; he welcomes frank criticism and has more than once said that if other counsels than his should

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Nehru's analysis: *Autobiography*, pp. 515-52.

prevail he would be prepared to leave the struggle to others, and at times has done so. Few men at his age still have so great a capacity for work and so iron a discipline. If he demands much from his followers it is because he sets them a high standard in his own practice.

He has on many occasions displayed great personal courage, e.g. when he insisted on addressing a large crowd of hostile mill-workers in Bombay in 1930, despite the fear of his friends that he might be maltreated, or his visit to Lancashire in 1931, when it was deeply affected by the boycott of English cloth. Again, none has ever been able to accuse him of self-interest. He has always had the supreme gift of divining what has been the popular sentiment at any moment and utilising it. His pithy economic style has permanently enriched the Gujarati language and is admirable even in English. He has repeatedly proved his political sagacity, despite what may be said to the contrary. He cannot be underrated as a statesman.

His great achievement is to have turned a movement of a limited number of intellectuals into a mass movement, to have insisted on the needs and demands of the hungry millions as no one has done before him, but at the same time it must not be forgotten that he has been the leader of the middle class in a colonial country. Nationalism under these conditions is always both a political demand and a desire for freedom on the part of the native merchants and capitalists. It is for this reason that Gandhi has tried to harmonise the interests of capital and labour in the belief that to divide the country on class lines would be to weaken the battle for freedom.

But Gandhi is also a product of his education and environment. Brought up in a narrowly orthodox home by a pious mother in a small state of which his father was an official, he did not feel the force of the new ideas which were

influencing his contemporaries in other parts of the country. When he went to England for study he was unhappy, and does not seem to have come into contact with any of the great minds of the day. Then, till his appearance on the Indian scene, he was in South Africa. It cannot be denied that there is a narrowness in his thought. The Socialists of to-day whom the Gandhi-men attack are, in a sense, in the line of development from the great Liberals who desired to utilise all that was good in the West—its efficiency and its machinery. I cannot but feel that Gandhi has done a disservice to his country by insisting on the East *versus* West controversy. In this respect Tagore is a far greater man. Gandhi does not seem to have clearly understood the West, and his belief, and that of his followers, that the West is decadent and wicked is erroneous, though recent events in Europe tend to play into their hands. They make a good bludgeon for the Gandhi-men to beat Europe with and to answer the Socialists. But India desperately needs more rationalism and more science. Even in a colonial country, nationalism can easily become introverted and rotten. As many of his friends admit Gandhi is not an intellectual man. He is not widely read, he shows little interest in culture, and his ideas on sex distress even his dearest friends. He is essentially a Puritan, though not a sad-faced one.

Gandhi is a product of India at a certain stage in her development, and this involves an ideology akin to that in certain other countries at a similar stage. The backward look to the past, the glorification of handicrafts, the insistence on individualism and Puritanism are all symptomatic of the repressed *bourgeoisie* from Rousseau to Hitler.

Gandhi's greatness lies in the fact that he has departed from the path of violence, whether through realism or ethical conviction, and that, without employing any vulgar demagoguery, he has harnessed the latent power in the masses.

## THE PRESENT CONDITION OF INDIA

He has constantly emphasised the danger of the "servile" mentality, and he has more than any other restored to multitudes of Indians a faith in themselves and what they can do. He has imposed on a rhetorical and rather dreamy people a spirit of organisation and discipline. Though in many ways Conservative, he has tried to break through the bonds of prejudice in certain directions. His critics tend to underestimate his importance as a reformer because they fail to understand how terribly tenacious social prejudices are in India. He is by no means popular with the Sanatanists, who once tried to throw a bomb at him. It is very easy to pick out passages in Gandhi's voluminous writings which give an impression of distressing obscurantism, but he has a great man's inconsistency, and other passages could be found to counteract the first. The enthusiasm which he evokes in his followers, even in such a man as Nehru, who frankly expresses his dislike of many of his ideas, is impressive. Gunther, in an article in the *American Nation* of February 19th describes the Working Committee as having a coherence and discipline not unlike that of the old Politbureau in Russia.

Gandhi has made the Congress organisation into a magnificent party machine. But all this is within the context of a naturally conservative temperament. There are people to the Right of Gandhi just as there are people to the Left of him. His great strength lies in the fact that he really has *no* ideology. He loves Newman's hymn, and the words "one step enough for me" perfectly describe his strategy and explain his success. He has an elasticity and a refusal to look too far ahead which differentiate him from other middle-class leaders. In some ways he is an opportunist.

He has prepared the ground for the new India; others will reap the harvest. He has created a new consciousness in the country, but it will remain with his successors whether

India will go on the path towards Fascism or not. Gandhism as a party-cry might easily lead in that direction. In a recent book on Fascism, M. N. Roy points out that the philosophical background of Fascism lies in a return to a "spiritual" philosophy akin to that of India. It would be tempting to enlarge on this, but one must not. There can be no doubt that there are elements in Hinduism which lend themselves to Fascist ideology; the rigid caste system, the suspicion of foreign culture, and an idealism which finds unity not in the equality of men, but in the realm of phantasy. Above all, the racial pride which the Aryans brought to India. Gandhi himself finds Communistic elements in Hinduism, but that might make the process more insidious! Gandhi dead might give an Indian Fascism its necessary "myth"! But such a tendency would be faced with the communal problem, which it could not obviously solve, and a minority which would not be crushed with the ease that Hitler crushed the Jews (cf. Chapter Six).

Gandhi himself is not Fascist, though he believes in a kind of benevolent paternalism. One must repeat that he is both complex and inconsistent. One side of him belongs to the world of the Pope and Mr. Buchmann! There is the same emphasis on moral offences and neglect of social antagonisms; the belief in the changing of individuals as the effective means of transforming society.<sup>1</sup> There must be the change of heart which will convert exploiters into servants of the people and trustees. Again, he has affinities with the Distributivism dear to the heart of the late G. K. Chesterton and he has the "Nonconformist conscience"! It would be interesting to compare Gandhi's position to that of the Papal encyclicals on social questions. There is much similarity, I think.

<sup>1</sup> Though he is right in putting emphasis on the *quality* of those who would follow him.



On the other hand, there are elements in Gandhism which are akin to the old Narodny movement in Russia. The belief in the "people" and the peasant as a basis for a new order and the readiness for struggle. From Tolstoy—a far greater man in many ways—Gandhi has gained a deep regard for manual labour. For the future he has never gone beyond a vague reference to Ram Raj—the Kingdom of God, which on one occasion he professed to find in Mysore State! (cf. p. 131). His success lies in the fact that he has voiced the longings of his fellow-countrymen; he represents them just where they are and appeals to their mysticism and sometimes to their common-sense. He is for millions the soul of India.

But large sections of the middle class are dissatisfied. Their economic distress makes them radical and it is inevitable that they should not be uninfluenced by events in the world outside. But while the "Left" is divided and quarrelsome, the Gandhi-men are a closely welded and disciplined group. Within the Working Committee one can see the most varied collection. The Socialists have refrained from being represented, as they would be always in a minority. Radicalism is represented by Pandit Nehru, who royally supports his colleagues, though he frequently disagrees with them.

Vallabhai Patel is a man to watch. He is coming into increasing prominence. He is responsible for the Parliamentary Sub-Committee and that gives him great influence. Leader of the *kulaks* of Gujerat, he is a power in Bombay Presidency. He is a master of racy vernacular invective, and a man of great ambition and determination. Gunther called him a typical "party boss"! He hates the Socialists and at Haripura bitterly attacked them in a manner which made even his friends rather uneasy. He may well play an important rôle in the future.

Bhulabhai Desai leads the Congress Opposition in the

Central Assembly. A charming, widely-travelled and cultured man and a constitutional lawyer of eminence, he compels respect. He would achieve great success in the House of Commons.

Abdul Ghaffar Khan is a giant of a man and essentially a warrior. He is utterly straightforward and in his simple Muslim way has vague sympathies towards Socialism. He loves Gandhi and is his most loyal friend.

Abdul Kalam Azad, another Muslim, is an Arab in origin and a great Islamic scholar and theologian.

Mr. Rajagopalachariar is now Prime Minister of Madras and one of the most consistent Gandhi-men. He has been called the "Deputy Gandhi." A South Indian Brahmin, he is a subtle and impressive figure.

It is interesting to note the phenomenal number of lawyers in the Congress ranks and among Indian politicians generally. Mr. Bose, the President of the Congress, is not easy to characterise. The great sacrifices he has made for the national cause have made him generally respected. He has called himself a Socialist, but one suspects that in many ways he is a little muddled, but he is an out-and-out nationalist; there is something rather Irish about him. He has a great admiration for De Valera. His friends all say that he is a most lovable man.

The Left lacks one outstanding figure of weight and ability. The leaders of the Congress Socialist Party are all young and no match for the seasoned veterans of the Congress. The Haripura Session showed how easily they could be out-manceuvred. Patel treated them rather as naughty children. Except in Behar and perhaps in U.P., the C.S.P. has no great contact with the masses. Their Socialism is perhaps a little exotic and "Bloomsbury"! Most of them, though not all, gain their theory from the English I.L.P. and have no love for the Communists. M. N. Roy is one of the mystery men of Indian politics. A Communist, he was once

a member of the Third International, and took part in the Chinese Revolution. On his return to India, he was in prison for some time. To-day he has not succeeded in gaining a following; the Left dislikes him and the Right distrusts him, but he is a brilliant man. It is difficult to tell whether he has any future in India.

Nehru has never joined the C.S.P. Gunther is probably right in regarding him as "Left Centre." He does not move happily in the realm of class-struggle, but, as I have said, he is a true democrat and anti-Fascist. He has done much to prevent the Congress from becoming self-centred and forgetful of the rest of the world. He is utterly sincere and personally one of the most attractive figures, not only in Indian politics, but in the world generally. He tends at times to be a little imperious and does not suffer fools gladly. To live with him is a delight. There is something about him that is wholesome and clean-cut, and he has a sense of humour. He shares this virtue with Mrs. Naidu, the poetess. On the whole, it is a rare virtue among the Congress politicians.

The Communists suffer from their long illegality and their isolation.<sup>1</sup> They, too, are generally young, but they have been hardened by adversity. I should say that the Gandhi-men respect them far more than the other Socialists. They are disciplined and their tactics are changing rapidly. To-day they are working for the United Front which Nehru encouraged when President and which Bose seems also to favour. The collective affiliation to the Congress of workers and peasants organisations has never been achieved and the Right is suspicious of groups on a class basis, claiming that the Congress itself can represent all classes. The Left is doubtful about it! There is no doubt that there will be a

<sup>1</sup> Only this May a young man was sentenced to two years' imprisonment for organising a provincial headquarters of the Communist Party. It is still illegal.

clash in the future. Many expected that it would come to a head at Haripura, but the Ministerial crisis overshadowed everything else, and all elements unite in a crisis. The ranks were closed and there was very little dissension. The Left were anxious to maintain the unity of the Congress with the prospect of a new struggle, but the Ministers returned to office and the Right is stronger than ever. (But cf. p. 71.)

But, as we have seen, the situation both among the peasants and in the industrial centres is disturbed and likely to remain so. Legislation has been passed; it has not altogether satisfied the masses, while it has frightened the property-owning class. A leading Gandhi-man remarked to me that they had done much for the capitalists, but that they had not been prepared to make concessions in return. The capitalists, as elsewhere, gave the nationalists the sinews of war; now the Congress will either have to put pressure on them or lose the support of the masses.

From a little coterie of middle-class intellectuals the Congress has become a party of  $3\frac{1}{2}$  millions, probably the largest in the world. Literacy will still further broaden its basis and safeguard its democratic character. The landlords and capitalists do not feel too easy about the Congress, and a section of the Muslim middle class is violently opposed to it, embarrassing the ministries whenever possible. But the Congress is immensely strong. During the period of office, it has restored a degree of civil liberty, reduced the salaries of Ministers to Rs.500 *per mensem*; it has fought the drink and opium traffic; it has rushed through the legislatures ameliorative measures; it has established enquiry committees in Bombay and Cawnpore, whose findings are favourable to the needs of the workers. If there were people who thought that the advent of the Congress to power would mean chaos, they have been grievously disappointed. But it was clever of the British to grant provincial autonomy. Congress to-day is

faced with the responsibility of government. This is always a limitation and a check on revolutionary activity. There is a tendency to restrain free speech in the name of non-violence that might be abused. Terrorism has virtually collapsed. To-day I doubt whether anyone in India believes in it. Some have become convinced of the efficacy of Gandhian non-violence; others have become Marxists.

The history of Indian nationalism has only just begun. It is not yet possible to prophesy whether it will lead to a democratic republic on Soviet lines, whether it will attain freedom and develop along *bourgeois* lines, or strike out a new line for itself, or come to terms with the British against the common foe, the revolutionary masses. At least, the future will be interesting and full of potentialities.

Slowly and with much travail a nation is being born.

## NOTE

But can one say that there is such a thing as Indian nationality? English writers in the past have liked to speak of the "peoples" of India, and they are convinced that only British might has kept India from becoming a number of warring states. It is possible that had it not been for the intervention of the British, India at a time of weakness might have given rise to sovereign states and gone through the anarchy and misery of internecine struggle from which Europe has not yet emerged.

But there is more unity historically in India than most people admit. Nehru has discussed this interestingly in an article in *Foreign Affairs* ("Unity of India," January 1938). In Hinduism, pilgrimages and the conception of the sacred soil, which I mention in Chapter Six, gave some conception of territorial unity from early days and there have been periods when virtually the whole continent was united under one ruler. Despite differences of language and even of race, there are real points of unity among Indians all over the country. There is the cultural unity of the Hindu background; from very early times it may be said that the

idea of "India" as a whole was known. In some respects it may be compared to the conception of "Christendom" in mediæval Europe. The obtrusive foreignness of the British rule has led to an awakening of a sense of history and a relating of the past to the present. One may take as an example the fact that there are close resemblances in the very vital Bengal school of painting to the life of the Ajanta frescoes. The terrorist movement in India, in some respects, may be related to the memory of Mahratta ascendancy and the life of Shivaji. Though the movement grew in Bengal, one of its instigators was a Mahratta.

Facility of communication is undoubtedly an important factor, and the placing of India within the context of world politics has the effect of making Indians more conscious of their oneness as a group. At one time, says A. C. Mazumdar (*Indian National Evolution*), "the stalwart and turbulent Punjabi, the intelligent and sensitive Bengali, the orthodox and exclusive Madrasi, the ardent and astute Mahratta, the anglicised Parsi and the cold calculating Gujerati were perfect strangers to one another," but easy communications and intercourse have brought them together and they are able to meet on a fraternal footing on the platform of the National Congress. And one can say that India has stamped these varied people with a common seal, and it would not be inaccurate to talk of a general Indian character or personality and even a consciousness of identity in the Indian mass. Sidney Low, when he visited India in 1905, remarked on this, even when referring to a "patchwork of humanity."

All India can claim the Vedic Rishis, Buddha, Asoka and many others; it was only in the Mohammedan period that Indian history became a chain of provincial histories, but the various provinces are becoming or, indeed, have become conscious of a new pan-Indian unity. Dutt (*op. cit.*) gives an example. No two people could be so different as the Bengalis and the Rajputs, but the events of Rajput history have exercised a fascination over the writers of Bengal, and Rajput plays are applauded in the Bengali theatre. Again, in Bengal there is no provincial feeling towards the Mahratta hero Shivaji, while the stories of the Sikh *gurus* have been enshrined in Bengali poetry. This is only one example of a tendency towards a synthesis of Indian history. Provincialism is a danger, as one may see from the case of Spain in European history. Indians as Indians are conscious of a

common sympathy when they hear of the sufferings of Indians abroad, and when Gandhi or Nehru visits any part of the country he is welcomed. Language differences need not be a drawback to unity, as is proved by the case of Switzerland, while Protestant and Catholic have been able to live together in peace in more than one country. There is a temple in Benares in which the equivalent to the idol is a map of India. This has dangers, obviously, but it is significant.

The Congress has to-day become a remarkable unifying factor and all over India one can see photographs of Congress leaders and people dressed in homespun. The development of Hindustani as an all-Indian language should have a profound effect on unification. One can see in the leading figures of present-day India markedly local characteristics, but they are being offered at one altar. Gandhi may go down to history as one who has achieved the miracle of forging once and for all an all-Indian unity which will last. Indian nationalism is by no means the same thing as nationalism in the West, though it is not without similar dangers. It represents the craving for a synthetic self-expression of India as such. It is necessary to say this, because the class-interpretation of nationalism can be dangerously one-sided.

On the other hand, the common problems of workers and peasants all over India can also make for unity. The development of trade unions can also have a unifying effect; the workers of Bombay and Ahmedabad know that the struggle of their Cawnpore comrades will have a vital effect on the question of their own wages.

To Tilak, *Swaraj* meant "People's Dominion," a modernised version of the ancient Indian conception of the State (cf. his lectures on Home Rule). The Kshatrya kings were controlled and advised by Councils of Elders and the age-long popular institutions. It seems that Tilak envisaged the continuance of the King-Emperor's suzerainty, but controlled by the will of the people: "The meaning of *Swarajya* is the retention of our Emperor and the rule of the English people and the full possession by the people of the authority to manage the remaining affairs." To-day Indian politicians would go farther than this, but Tilak's position is an interesting reminder of the fact that historically in India government was by no means a matter only of the king (cf. p. 178).

The most urgent necessity in India to-day is the speedy development of vigorous *panchayats* and autonomous local bodies which will have a real democratic character. Independence has been weakened by constant reference to the Central Government, and one of the great weaknesses of British rule to-day is that it makes a magnificent scapegoat. "Ah! We have a foreign government. What can we do?" And the result is a tragic lack of initiative and much corruption in local government.

Tagore once wrote that "the government in our country, the *Sarkar*, has no relations with our social organisation, the *Samaj*, so that whatsoever we may seek from the former must be paid for out of our own freedom. From whichever of its duties our *Samaj* seeks relief by getting it done by the *Sarkar*, to that extent will it be disabled with an incapability which was not of its essence in the past. To-day we are striving, of our own accord, to place in the hands of the *Sarkar* the whole duty of our *Samaj*." It is necessary to purge the *Samaj* of the vestiges of caste and to interpret it in terms of social democracy, but the words of Tagore are a valuable corrective to governmental bureaucracy and to any Fascist tendencies.

The growth of organisations on an economic basis can be most fruitful in India, breaking down caste divisions and recreating a healthy independence and checking the tendency to extreme centralisation. That there must be a strong central government in India is obvious, but its functions must be strictly limited and efficiently related to the delegated powers, not only of autonomous provinces, but to innumerable local bodies. The Soviet Constitution, at least on paper, has this pattern, and in a country as large as India it is essential. It also, though suffering a sea-change, corresponds to some of the ideals of the past.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### RAJAH

*"Everyone who approaches an Indian prince brings butter in a lordly trowel."*

EDWARD THOMPSON

*Time and Tide*, January 1st, 1938

*"The states are . . . glittering pools of absolutism."*

JOHN GUNTHER<sup>1</sup>

THE ISSUE OF FEDERATION has brought the whole question of the Princes into increasing prominence.

It is ironical that, while Indian students are at times debarred from work in the hospitals and find it hard to get lodgings on account of colour prejudice, the advent of an Indian prince to London sets the gossip columnists agog. The most aristocratic ladies will dance with him and the highest society receives him; the doors of the greatest are open to him. Why? It is hard to tell.

The greatest of all the Indian princes, if one judges by the standard of character and achievement, is probably the Maharajah of Mysore; he has only been once to England and then unobtrusively. As far as I know, the Nizam of Hyderabad—the richest man in the world—has never been. These paragons of London society are often the smaller princelings, who parade their magnificence before the eyes of Mayfair lovelies at the expense of their impoverished peasantry. The conditions of workers and peasants which have been reviewed in previous chapters are all far worse in many of the states, where there are often fantastic taxes and no factory laws.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. his amusing article in the American *Saturday Evening Post*, May 14th, 1938.

Let us take for an example the Maharajah of Bikanir, that most loyal ally of the British and a popular figure in England. It is true that the ruler deserves praise for having rescued land from the ever-encroaching desert, but the following facts have also to be considered.

The Legislative Assembly consists of twenty-seven nominated members and eighteen elected members, twelve representing municipalities, three Sardars, three Zemindars. Out of fifteen municipalities, ten are wholly nominated and the remaining five are overwhelmingly so. The Assembly is purely advisory. But this Assembly would seem to be a mere show-piece; on one occasion it transacted all the business of a year in two days. It provided only £15,000 for education and a sum of over £17,000 for palace expenses. The percentage of revenue spent on education comes to 1·2 per cent., while the cost of primary education is about 0·2 per cent. There is one school for every 135 villages in the state, or for every 1,175 miles. The total education costs come to about 3½ annas per head. The percentage of expenditure on medical relief is 1·5 per cent. of the total revenue. There are in all twenty-eight hospitals and dispensaries, and these include those specially reserved for railway and canal workers. Under this head there is also expenditure on the royal family.

There are 500 miles of railway, but, despite the scorching sun and sands, there are no shelters for passengers at stations and an inadequate water-supply. The staff is horribly under-paid and both fares and freight charges are higher than on neighbouring lines. In an area of 23,500 square miles, the total mileage of roads is 200, and the greater part of these is reserved for royal use only. There is a heavy customs-duty and everyone who enters the state is subjected to both a search of person and belongings.

As to taxation, it takes many forms. There is a kind of poll tax. This varies from Rs.10 per annum for confectioners

and goldsmiths to Rs.2 for porters. The various crafts and workers pay within these two rates. For every cow or ox the owner has to pay Rs.3 to the State. Here, as in other states, a special tax is levied on occasions of royal marriages or funerals, e.g. Rs.48,169 are said to have been received as marriage tax for the nuptials of the Heir-Apparent. The State also exacts 25 per cent. of the sale price as State duty on all sales of immovable property. There are also agricultural, municipal and other taxes.

The Administration Report for the State for 1928 referred to famine conditions, and added that His Highness generously suspended the collections of instalments of the purchase money of lands sold, but the figure given shows that, despite famine conditions, the revenue collections exceeded the estimated income.

An official note on the Administration states that 5 per cent. of the revenues is drawn for the Privy Purse, but this does not include the upkeep of furnishing the residences of His Highness or of his motor cars, carriages, horses, etc. But reference is made to the ruler's desire that the liability of the State be restricted. There are also indirect items of expenditure, such as palace gardens, vehicles, ceremonials, electricity in palaces and marriages. These would bring Palace expenditure up to 32.6 per cent. of the revenues of the State.

In the Census Report of 1921 the number of born slaves in Bikanir State was given as 10,904. These people were kept by the Prince and his feudatories and treated as slaves. They were given the coarsest food and clothing and made to render all kinds of service, being considered, with their wives and children, as their master's property. They were given away as dowry or presents and married or divorced at their master's will.

One of the most popular figures in England used to be

Ranji, the cricketer. He is dead, but let us look at his state, Navanagar, a petty state in Kathiawar, one of many such.

"No person, association, gathering should address a public meeting on political matters without the permission of the political secretary, which should be secured in advance. . . . No political meeting of any kind should be held" (Order of 1921, still in force). Even social and religious meetings are gagged. There is no Press law. All political papers are forbidden, while social and religious periodicals are not permitted to refer to politics, the Editors having to sign a bond of Rs.500.

There is in this, as in many other states, no liberty of person. No judiciary can issue *Habeas Corpus* for the bodies of persons illegally detained by orders of the Maharajah or his officers. Nothing but an oral or executive order is needed to seize property of any citizen. In the capital city of Navanagar, which is large, cultured and containing men of outstanding ability, the people have no voice in the administration of the municipality. It is administered by one officer of State. Innumerable taxes are collected, and the municipality has a total revenue of Rs.1,71,904, yet the people have no say in its allotment. There are special roads reserved for cars (which virtually means the Prince, because there are few private cars). There are also public roads which are banned to bullock-carts, though a heavy wheel tax is collected for these carts. There are twelve towns and 675 villages in the state; 35 per cent. at least live in villages. Outside Navanagar there are no municipalities of importance and in the villages there is no semblance of municipal amenities; no sanitation, lighting, roads, nor are there local boards, *panchayats* or the like. There are two beautiful roads from Navanagar to the Prince's health resort and hunting-camp respectively. Both are marked "Not for carts."

In this state there is no legislative body. It is true that the Prince once declared to the Viceroy that he had moved with the times and had established an advisory council. The facts are that in 1919 the Jam Sahib issued an order establishing a council and *appointing* certain gentlemen as members. It was summoned to meet and the Jam Sahib delivered an address and so did the Maharajah of Alwar, who was on a visit to the state; it dispersed. So far as I can gather, it has never met again or been referred to!

There is no proper legislation. Administration is run by orders, circulars and rules issued at the sweet will of the ruler and his secretaries. In the Administration Report of the state it is impossible to get any clear conception of its finances. As in other states, there is a fixed civil list, but all sorts of expenditure will be debited to different heads. Superfluous palaces are debited to public works, money spent on princelings to education, and so on. Independent auditing is never allowed in most states. In Navanagar there are State monopolies, not only of intoxicants, but also of tobacco, cotton and salt. Villagers are instructed to smoke more and use more salt!

The *shikar* (hunt) in this state is famous not only for its variety, but also for the luxurious arrangements of the camps. These involve all kinds of petty tyrannies for the people, who are forbidden to kill the wild beasts that damage the crops and kill the inhabitants. For instance, in the village of Bhalsan an old lady was pounced on by a panther and killed. None dared to rescue her. Many other cases could be cited. In this state, as in many others, innumerable villagers have to leave their work and labour compulsorily at times of *shikar*. There are an incredible number of taxes. An agriculturalist has to pay more than 60 per cent. of his income in taxes. Enormous sums are spent on the personal luxuries of the ruler, estimated at 50 per cent. of the

revenues. The poorest people have to pay for his fishing in Ireland and his other foreign tours.

The coming to a state of a Viceroy or some other distinguished visitor involves mad expenditure. Lord Irwin's visit to Navanagar alone cost 27 *lakhs* of rupees. It included the purchase of thirty-four new cars, of which two were Rolls and four were Lanchesters, and a new ship. Rs.100,000 were spent on the state banquet.

In 1926-7 1·5 per cent. was spent on education; 0·9 per cent. on medicine. There were sixteen dispensaries as compared to twenty-nine liquor shops. But let us turn to some general considerations.

Slavery is not uncommon in the states. We have seen the figures for Bikanir. At Geneva in 1926 it was said that slavery "in the ordinary sense does not exist in the states" and that the Government of India were satisfied that this was the case, but were prepared to "urge the rulers of the states to institute reforms where necessary." Despite this repudiation, there are 160,735 slaves in the Rajputana states, known under various names and found in the palaces of the rajahs and their feudatories. Their conditions are such as those I have already referred to in the case of Bikanir. *Begar* or forced labour is little better than slavery. The depressed classes, nearly 18 per cent. of the population of Rajputana, are the main sufferers from this imposition. But *begar* is only being stopped with some difficulty in British India. When the Viceroy visits a state, the railroad may be lined with men caught for forced labour, standing with torches in their hands and their backs to the train. Artisans, cultivators and other manual labourers are also required to render unpaid or ill-paid service of a compulsory nature. In the factories of Rajputana, 1,021 children under fourteen are employed.

The communal aspect of the states is interesting. The Nizam

rules over fourteen millions of whom thirteen millions are Hindu, but the state is a Muslim state. The Court language is Urdu and it is also the medium of instruction, though it is not the language of the people. In Bhopal the same conditions hold good. There 89 per cent. of the population are Hindus. Kashmir has a Hindu ruler with a predominantly Muslim population. Its agrarian grievances recently led to considerable disturbances and the peasants actually gained some redress.

There are more than 6,000 states of varying importance. Hyderabad and Mysore are as large as a major European country; others are tiny, little more than "squirearchies." Bilbari has a population of 27 and an annual revenue of Rs.80! There are some who wish to perpetuate these vestiges of an ancient civilisation, as a kind of Indian Ulster of federal India, acting as a permanent check on progress. As the President of the States' Peoples Conference remarked in 1936, "they constitute an underworld, the secrets of which would take years to unravel and decades to obliterate." But sooner or later they must disappear. As Mr. Thompson remarks in the review article quoted above, that, while the Princes are clamouring for their sovereign rights, it is not explained why British India "ought to go forward to complete self-government, but the people of native India remain pawns in the all-important game of preserving their rulers' status unimpaired."

When the political settlement was made, the Princes stood for nationalism in India. The most independent of them went under, but to-day "they are feudalism's last stronghold." "They are no more princes than the Japanese Samurai were or our own British barons in Henry VIII's time. Paramountcy is based on British strength—not treaties." There was a time when the princes were known for their chivalry and courage and independence and in

Chapter Six<sup>1</sup> I refer to the fact that in ancient India there were many forms of political life; it is a tragic mistake to suppose that despotism and pomp is necessarily congenial to the Indian soil. But subjection has wrought havoc among the Princes. They are given freedom to tyrannise within limits over their subjects, to have a salute of guns and all the trappings of royalty at the expense of their starving subjects, but in fact they are puppets. Mr. Chudgar (in his book, *Indian Princes*) quotes from *The Times* of 1853. The same conditions still prevail:

We have emancipated these pale and ineffectual pageants of royalty from the ordinary fate that waits on an Oriental despotism. . . . This advantage (of securing able and vigorous princes through rebellion) "we have taken away from the inhabitants of the states of India still governed by native princes. It has been well said that we give these princes power without responsibility. Our hand of iron maintains them on the throne, despite their imbecility, their vices and their crimes. The result is in most of the states a chronic anarchy, under which the revenues of the states are dissipated between the mercenaries of the camp and minions of the Court. . . .

Till the Mutiny the policy of the East India Company and the British Government had been to annex states by deposing their rulers for mis-government or in cases when a ruler died without direct heir or for many other reasons. But it was Lord Dalhousie who protested against this policy, and, like a prophet, declared that the Indian Princes if maintained, would provide the bulwark of British power in India and its last stronghold. This prophecy was actually realised when a large number of Princes rallied to the British and helped in putting down the so-called Mutiny; the last and puppet Emperor was deposed and made captive. The Government of India was taken over by the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. p. 178 and note on p. 129.



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Crown and Lord Canning was appointed as the first Governor-General under the Act of 1858. He issued a proclamation guaranteeing the integrity of the Indian states and the perpetuation of the Princes and their dynasties. Adoption *sanads* were granted to several Princes, securing them the right of adoption which till then had been denied them.

Various Viceroys have followed different policies in regard to the Princes. For a decade after 1858 they tended to intervene in cases of injustice and maladministration, and this acted as a check upon misrule or misconduct. Both the British and the Indian Governments admitted responsibility for internal good government of the states; at one time it was claimed as the right of the Paramount Power (i.e. the British Government) to prescribe the forms of administration and to insist that these be adopted. This responsibility and claim was asserted on the grounds that the British Government *was* the Paramount Power and that it issued from the terms of treaties and *sanads* made from time to time, and that this Power had an obligation to ensure the progress and prosperity of India as a whole.

Lord Lytton, in his despatch to the Secretary of State prior to the rendition of Mysore in 1882, wrote:

The British Government now undertakes the duty of protecting all native states of India from external enemies and of preserving internal order by measures necessary for securing the people from misgovernment and for supplying the lawful authority of the ruler. So also the powers of the British Government to prescribe the forms of administration and to insist that its advice be adopted are the necessary co-relatives of the admitted responsibilities of the British Government for the internal peace of the whole Empire and general welfare of the people.

Lord Salisbury laid down the following principle of the

regulation of the responsibilities of the Paramount Power towards the states:

I venture to offer that the first cardinal principle of the whole system, the maintenance of the supremacy of the Paramount Power, originates in the policy of Lord Wellesley and Lord Hardinge; that the second cardinal principle, the preservation of the autonomy of the feudatory states was clearly expressed in the proceedings which followed the mutiny during the viceroyalty of Lord Canning and has since been very emphatically affirmed by acts and proclamations of the Government; and that the third cardinal principle, *the denial of any right divine to govern wrongly*, has been established by the course taken by the Government on many occasions and notably in the trial and deposition of the Gaekwar of Baroda.

Lord Curzon's words are as true to-day as when they were first uttered thirty years ago:

I claim him (the native chief) as my colleague and partner. He cannot remain *vis-à-vis* the Empire, a loyal subject of His Majesty the King Emperor, and *vis-à-vis* his own people, a frivolous and irresponsible despot. He must justify and not abuse the authority committed to him. He must be the servant as well as the master of his people; he must learn that his revenues are not secured to him for his own selfish gratification, but for the good of his subjects; that his internal administration is only exempt from correction in proportion as it is honest, and that his *gadi* is not intended to be a divan of indulgence, but the stern seat of duty. His figure should not be merely known on the polo-ground or on the race-course or in the European hotel. His real work, his princely duty, lies among his own people. By this standard shall I, at any rate, judge him. By this test will he in the long run as a political institution perish or survive.

The policy of intervention has been relaxed from time to time after the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms and now it has been completely abandoned and exists in theory only; although the Butler Committee states that intervention may be a duty:

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The guarantee to protect a Prince from insurrection carries with it an obligation to enquire into the causes of insurrection and to demand that the Prince shall remedy legitimate grievances and an obligation to prescribe the measure necessary to this result.

But despite this, the Paramount Power keeps the Prince on his *gadi*, but declines to interfere even in the cases of the grossest misrule. Within the course of the last few years, incredible outrages have been proved to have been committed in numerous states all over India. We have hinted at something of the excessive taxation and the conditions of well-nigh serfdom that exist in many states. One may add that with a few honourable exceptions there is no rule of Law, no liberty of person, freedom of speech, Press or association. The judiciary is corrupt. An absentee landlord is bad enough; an absentee Prince, wandering about the capitals of Europe, buying Derby winners or patronising cricket, is worse, especially when he holds the reins of supreme power. He represents the sole executive and legislative and judicial functions. From him the Courts derive their power. There are no laws but the Prince's will. In the "courts of justice" no charge may be brought against a state official. (This includes a village schoolmaster or a policeman!) Those who administer the law are often quite inexperienced. In some states the Prince presides over his own Court or the Prime Minister in his stead. Neither may have the least knowledge of Law. In several of the Kathiawar states subordinate magistrates and judges get as little as £80 to £100 a year! First-rate men often find it impossible to work under the conditions in the states.

When the Prince is his own Judge of Appeal, people may wait for a hearing for years. The Prince is away on urgent state business (Paris?). When the appeal is heard, the Prince may be too tired or bored to study the data. Elaborate

questions are advanced. The arguments are prolonged. "I shall consider the case and give my decision as soon as possible," says the Prince, and promptly forgets all about it! The records get dusty or even lost. If a decision is come to, it is generally "Appeal dismissed"! As to the sordid tales of bribery and corruption, it is best not to speak. Conditions are so unbearable that thousands of people migrate yearly into British India and foreign lands. The advice of successive Viceroy's to read the signs of the times is ignored. The Princes believe that they are the bulwarks of imperialism and that they will be maintained.

If they claim to be independent sovereigns who gained their position by treaty, there can be no duty which can oblige the British to protect them from popular rebellion to depose them or to enforce non-autocratic government. Mr. Chudgar points out that treaties between a nation and an individual are unknown to international law. The Crown means the King in Parliament, and the Prince ought to, but does not, mean the ruler *and* his people in their representative character. There has never been any canvassing of the wishes of the states people. Were there a free plebiscite taken in many states, it would almost certainly be in favour of annexation and the pensioning off of the rulers. There is actually a long list of rulers who have been deposed without their subjects having expressed the slightest sympathy for them. The Federal Act of 1935 admits every absurd claim put forward by the Princes, and the constitution is framed so as to maintain them and their arbitrary and despotic form of government, yet many of them are holding back from federation. They feel, that they are between Scylla and Charybdis; if they join the federation, they think that, sooner or later, they will have to surrender their power by the force of public opinion and the pressure of popular government in the rest of India; if they do not

join, some of them think that they will continue to be protected in their present position at the cost of the British.

Among fifty-four members of the League of Nations, forty-five nations were republics and only nine had limited monarchies like that of England, yet within India, 561 princes and princelings expect to be maintained as absolute despots. Like so many Canutes, they hope to use British Imperialism to hold back the rising tide of democracy or even Socialism, but the present position of Britain in the world is such as to make concessions to Indian opinion and to the Congress inevitable, as is already clear. India must be kept friendly; her weakness and unarmed condition is a danger opposite a predatory Japan. What will be the position of the Princes, if power passes to a National Government in British India? They may find themselves prisoners in their insolvent palaces!

At this stage it may be well to say something of the attitude of the Congress to the states. It has been somewhat ambiguous. When the All-India Congress Committee in Calcutta in October, 1937, passed a resolution protesting against repression in Mysore State and called for support and encouragement to the people of the state in their "non-violent struggle," it produced a vehement protest from Mr. Gandhi. He referred to a previous resolution of non-interference in the affairs of the states and said that the resolution was *ultra vires*. This brought up three important questions:

(1) Would the Congress agree to the initiation of civil disobedience in the states? (2) If the states people initiated such a movement, would the Congress countenance it and give it friendly support? (3) Or would the Congress under no circumstances support such a movement under Congress auspices?

The resolution of the Working Committee which was

produced and slightly amended at Haripura Congress is the answer. It created a hot discussion and a "united front" between the very moderate representatives from the states and the Socialists. It emphasised that the aim of the Congress was complete independence as an objective for all-India, and that therefore the Congress stood for "full responsible government and guarantee of civil liberties in the states," yet at the same time the resolution suggested that all Congress committees should be disbanded in the states on the plea that they could not function effectively, and that it was inconsistent with the dignity of the Congress to countenance them or to risk insult to the national flag when it had no power to protect or help them. It has also been said to me that to encourage agitation in the states would be to disperse strength and to attempt to fight on too many fronts at once.

A compromise was reached at Haripura through the mediation of the veteran Congressman, Dr. Pattabhi Siteramayya, who is now closely associated with the States Peoples Conference, and to whom I am indebted for help with this chapter. It was agreed that committees should not be disbanded, but that their activities should be strictly controlled by the Working Committee. This compromise by no means satisfied many, but there is no doubt that a large section of the Congress feels that, till the goal is reached in British India, the states people must fight their own battles. The Nehru Report made it clear in 1928 that a Round Table Conference should include representatives not only of the Princes, but also of their subjects. It defined a Federal State, in the words of Professor Newton, as "a perpetual union of several sovereign States based first upon a treaty between those States or upon some historical status common to them all, and secondly upon a federal constitution, accepted by their citizens."

In 1928 the Congress passed a resolution urging the Princes to introduce responsible self-government based on representative institutions and the fundamental rights of citizenship. This was reaffirmed at Lahore in 1929. At the second Round Table Conference, Gandhi said that the Congress claimed to represent the whole of India and called upon the Princes to "find a place" for the "lowest classes" in any scheme that might be evolved, and to conciliate their subjects by conceding "some fundamental rights as the common property of all India." In a letter to Mr. N. C. Kelkar in 1934, Gandhi wrote that the policy of non-interference with the states was sound, and that British India had no more power to shape the policy of the states than it has in the case of Afghanistan or Ceylon. French India is part of geographical India as well as the states, but "we are powerless to shape the course of events there." He added: "I would like the states to grant autonomy to their subjects and would like the Princes to regard themselves and be in fact trustees for the peoples over whom they rule, drawing for themselves solely a small and definite percentage of the income. . . . I do not seek to destroy their status. I believe in the conversion of individuals and societies." In another letter he said: "I detest corruption, high-handedness, unbridled autocracy as much as you or anyone else, but these are no monopolies of the Princes. . . . I am as impatient for radical reforms in the states as anyone can be. But I admit that my impatience is conditioned by my—or, if you will, our—patent helplessness. Between the subjects of the states and of British India there is undoubtedly conscious identity of interests. The Princes as a class do not recognise it, unfortunately. They seem to believe in watertight compartments. In this they have the protection of British Law and British arms."

There can be no doubt that the successful operation of

provincial autonomy will deeply influence the more awakened of the states people. But the idea that there can be a federation between modern democratic provinces and feudal autocracies is absurd. Lord Lothian and others seem to be realising that federation will have to wait till the Princes become good democrats, but for how many can that be possible? No one in India, in or out of the Congress, has any objection to the principle of federation; in fact, they realise its necessity, but they cannot tolerate it in the form proposed, unless there is first some clear pledge that full democracy will be established in the states. At a time when England is posing as one of the last champions of democracy in Europe, it is ironical that she should be preserving these hoary despotisms and even considering the welding of them to the new young democracy which is emerging in India.

The importance of federation is seen in such questions as factory legislation, wage machinery or prohibition, where a different standard prevailing in the states will make enforcement very difficult. There are parts of India where various states and British India are constantly impinging, and it is not easy to know where the one begins and the other ends. Before there can be any satisfactory settlement in India the problem of the Princes has to be faced. As Thompson says, "the dead hand of 1819 cannot fetter 1938 to feudal conditions."

## NOTE

This dark picture of the states may lead some to assume that India has been saved from tyranny by British rule and, if that be removed, will relapse into it. I touch on the past in Chapter Six, and it may be worth adding a point.

There is ample evidence that in early Indian history there existed Indian states with oligarchic or republican forms of



government. Professor Rhys Davis, in his *Buddhistic India*, says: "The administrative and judicial business of the clan was carried out in public assembly in which young and old were alike present in their common moot-hall at Kapilavastu. A single chief, how and for what period chosen we do not know, was elected as office-holder presiding over the sessions and, if no sessions were sitting, over the state. He bore the title of Raja, which must have meant something like the Roman consul or the Greek archon. The earliest Buddhist records reveal the survival, side by side with different grades of monarchy, of republics with either complete or modified independence." Even as late as the time of Alexander's invasion, popular institutions flourished in the numerous principalities of the Punjab. A succession of brilliant rulers—Chandragupta Maurya, his grandson, Asoka the Great, and others till well after the seventh century A.D. left marks of great administration and compelled the admiration of foreign travellers. In Bengal, according to a Sanskrit work called *Manjusri Mulkalpa*, a republic existed after King Sasanka for some time. The famous Bengali king, Gopal, was an elected monarch, and even before him a popular Sudra leader was elected King and ruled for seventeen years; this incidentally shows that caste could not have been so rigid even in the eighth century. In South India the Cholas adopted the village community as the unit of government.

But these systems of government came to an end with the successive waves of invasion in the twelfth century. There followed incessant struggles between the Hindu rulers and the Mohammedan dynasties, till large tracts of the country passed under the sway of the Mogul house of Timur. At the close of the reign of Aurungzeb, decay and corruption set in. The rise of the Mahratta power under Shivaji and of the Sikhs were interludes in the story of decline, and provided some interesting new examples of government, but they could not resist the power from the West.

But out of the wreck of independent India some good things have come. Not the whole of princely India is decadent and beastly. It is good to be able to refer to *some* more or less progressive states, such as those in South India, Travancore and Cochin and Mysore. (One may add Gwalior and Baroda and perhaps Bhavnagar.) Travancore has opened temples to the Untouchables and has a higher degree of literacy than many other parts of

India. Travancore, Cochin and Mysore have brilliant Ministers. They have some degree of representative government. Mysore has fostered industrialisation and for many of the poor peasants electricity is available. Conditions in these states compare very favourably with other parts of India, but there is still much to do. Louis Bromfield in his novel, *The Rains Came*, gives an attractive picture of a state trying to overcome its bad traditions and build a new life, but at the end it leaves us with a benevolent autocracy governing with the help of enlightened individuals. This is just the difficulty.

For instance, take Mysore. It is impossible not to be attracted by this beautiful state, with its large cities and fine buildings, its power stations and works of irrigation and its magnificent ancient monuments, carefully preserved. The Maharajah himself is a deeply cultured and devout man. Gandhi found "Ram Raj" in Mysore. But democracy is strictly limited. The Assembly has 280 members, of whom 250 are elected. They can criticise but cannot control the administration. The Legislative Council has limited powers of control, but is presided over by the Dewan (Prime Minister), and a permanent minority of elected representatives. There are municipalities under the control of nominated presidents, district boards with elected presidents, but subject to considerable official control, and *panchayats* which are rather handmaids of the officials. The new power of the Congress in the adjoining provinces of Bombay and Madras has naturally kindled similar aspirations in the hearts of the Mysoreans—an extremely intelligent people.

They had received a rude shock in 1934 when they were told by the Dewan in his speech to the Assembly that "there is no idea of introducing further changes in the Constitution. . . . I cannot help expressing my surprise that this policy should have been advocated at a time when parliamentary democracy is decaying everywhere." In Mysore both Congress and independent bodies existed, and in 1937 the People's Federation joined the Congress. On the eve of the amalgamation a leading Congressman was arrested on a charge of sedition. Cases of repression and bans on distinguished British Indian Congressmen have been common. Early this year serious trouble ensued and firing took place; a number of people (I think thirty-two) were killed and many injured. But one may be allowed to prophesy that democracy is

only a matter of a very short time in Mysore and already it looks as if a settlement will be made. Even in the most progressive states there is a restriction of civil liberties.

Among the Princes there stands out one individual whose position is unique. He is a prince without a state, the Aga Khan. He has been granted a salute of guns and the title of "Highness" and he has played a significant rôle in Indian affairs. Though no Indians invited him so to do, he represented India at the League of Nations, and he also led the British Indian delegation to the Round Table Conference. Above all, he has won the Derby! The British have found him a useful instrument and he is highly popular in English society. His grandfather married a daughter of the Shah of Persia, who gave him the title which is borne by his grandson. After the death of the Shah, he tried to gain the throne and had to flee the country, settling in Bombay. The Aga Khan is hereditary head of a prosperous sect of Mohammedan merchants, who mostly came from Persia. He thus combines spiritual and material advantages!

I have purposely omitted reference to the personal characters of many of the Princes, because I have no desire either to be scandalous or pornographic, but something perhaps should be said on this unsavoury subject.

The ruler of Indore who was deposed was notorious and there is the celebrated Mr "A." In Central India there is a state called Jhabua. A pamphlet published in 1934 gives the following interesting statistics:

The Ruler had nine official *ranees* (queens). In addition to them, he had twenty-six *paswans* and three prostitutes, kept as *paswans*. These *paswans* are women appropriated by the Rajah without the formality of marriage with himself or divorce from any previous husband. Rajahs are above law and therefore commit no offence either moral or legal. Each *paswan* represents a tragedy. The same pamphlet quotes from a letter written by one of the *ranees*: "I was married in the year 1912. A few days after the marriage, I found myself in a very difficult position. In a way I am a prisoner in the Palace, and pass my days as a captive in a room. The income from my *jagir* is Rs.11,000 per annum, but I only get Rs.5 monthly for my expenses. There is no proper arrangement for my necessities of life. The other married *ranees* are more or less in similar conditions. One has gone mad on account of

these troubles. . . . The Rajah Sahib . . . threatened that he would kill me and make me work as the sweeper for his mistresses. . . . My life is still in danger. My health is not good. We, all the *ranees*, are suffering the punishment of hell. . . ." A similar letter appeared some years ago from the wife of another Prince in a Bombay paper. There is no need to pursue this delicate subject; only too many states have their *Parc aux Cerfs*, and the persons of the female subjects are no safer than they were in the France of Louis XV.

It is not easy for Princes to grow up as good men. They are surrounded from birth by fawning menials and the enervating atmosphere of the *zenana* and they are taught to regard themselves as little gods. The special schools provided for the Princes do not help much. There they are segregated from ordinary boys and only able to associate with the sycophants who accompany them and with their fellow-Princes. If they go to Europe, they only too often learn more of its vice than of its virtue. By the time a prince ascends the *gadi* he may already be an accomplished *roué* and a confirmed libertine. Despite the many solemn injunctions laid upon the Princes by Viceroys and Residents, they rarely get the training to be efficient or self-sacrificing servants of the people. If they are not actually profligate, they are extravagant.

It is significant that the best ruler in India—Mysore—has only once visited Europe and that was very recently. He was brought up on the strictest Hindu lines by his mother. I doubt whether the Maharajah of Travancore has travelled abroad much. There is no doubt that much depends upon the training of the Princes. The son of a small chief whom I happen to know—a most progressive young man—was educated at a good Indian college alongside other young men and then sent to Oxford. The result was that he became a Radical!

\* \* \* \* \*

Since this chapter was written there have been some important developments in the states.

In the small state of Mansa the peasantry conducted a campaign and won it. There is unrest in Kashmir. In Rajkot, the major state of the Western Kathiawar Agency, a veritable people's movement has come into being. With a population of

75,000, over 60 per cent. of whom live in the city, Rajkot has an average income of 11½ *lakhs* of rupees. Of this nearly 7 *lakhs* are appropriated by the Rajah and his retinue. To satisfy their greed, monopolies have been granted for articles of everyday use, like matches, ice and sugar. Another source of income is licensed gambling.

The Administration, the Dewan, distributes offices of the Government to his relatives and favourites, though the Constitution provides for a Popular Assembly. I understand that it has not met for years. The people put up with oppression for a long time. Recently the Dewan entrusted his work to his son and appointed his nephew Police Superintendent—both unpopular men. These instances of nepotism provoked the people at a time when they were becoming increasingly conscious of their lack of democratic rights. On August 16th there ensued a brutal *lathi* charge by the police; the struggle for the abolition of licensed gambling became a struggle against the State, and a United People's Committee was formed.

After the *lathi* charge, in which 200 were wounded and eighty thrown into jail, a wave of indignation swept through Kathiawar, and police orders were defied on a mass basis. The people demanded the dismissal of the Dewan and his nephew, and responsible government. A social reform movement had become a political struggle.

The right wing Congress leader of Gujerat, Sardar Patel, unexpectedly denounced the Administration. He has always supported the policy of non-intervention in states' affairs, but it is reported that he has even advocated a united front with the Socialists in the state in order to carry on the struggle.

But the most important issue is in the supposedly progressive state of Travancore, where scenes like those common in British India during the Civil Disobedience days have become common. In three centres the military have fired on the crowds and *lathi* charges occur daily. The leaders of the State Congress are in prison, but the people are united in their determination to win political rights. The brilliant and well-known Dewan, Sir C. P. Ramaswamy Iyer, boasted that he would crush the State Conference, but to-day he faces a growing mass movement. Prohibitory orders are defied, and the people's movement grows. The students responded to the call of a general strike, and girls

in many centres have led student processions in defiance of the authorities. The working class has also entered the arena and thousands of cotton-mill workers assembled at Quilon, two being killed when the military fired upon the crowd. A strike followed. The powerful Syrian Christian community has joined hands with Hindus, and communal differences are forgotten. The Syrians were hard hit by the recent spectacular collapse of one of the leading Travancore banks.

Even Mr. Gandhi has felt it necessary to criticise the State authorities. One is forced to ask how far the Congress will be able to continue ultimately the policy of non-intervention in the states.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SAHIB

*"It is not enough that we confer on the natives the benefits of just laws and of moderate taxation, unless we endeavour to raise their character; but under a foreign government there are so many causes that tend to depress it that it is not easy to prevent it from sinking. It is an old saying that he who loses his liberty loses half his virtue. That is true of nations as well as individuals. To have no property scarcely degrades more in one case, than in the other to have property at the disposal of a foreign government in which we have no share. The enslaved nation loses the privileges of a nation as the slave does those of a freeman: it loses the privileges of taxing itself, of making its own laws, of having any share in their administration or in the internal government of the country. . . . It is not even the arbitrary power of a national sovereign, but the subjection to a foreign one, that destroys national character and extinguishes national spirit. . . . It would be more desirable that we should be expelled from the country altogether than that the result of our system of government should be such an abasement of a whole people."*

From a Minute by SIR THOMAS MUNRO, December 31st, 1824

#### I

THIS EARLY BRITISH ADMINISTRATOR loved India passionately, and he is still commemorated, I am told, in some parts of Madras Presidency in songs and ballads. In the quotation given there could not be more clearly expressed the justification for Indian nationalism. It reminds us of the strange contradiction in the English people, which may result from their mixed blood—the Celt warring with the Saxon in every British breast!

We can see a twofold strand in the history of British colonial expansion, each strand contradicting the other. There is the liberal tradition, often but not always animated by a pure religious feeling, enshrined in some of the poetry

of Wordsworth, Milton and of Blake; in the village Hampdens and in those obstreperous persons who, in order to watch over their democratic rights, make miserable the lives of chairmen of committees. From John Ball, William Langland, Sir Thomas More and the Chartists to men like Tom Mann, Charles Kingsley, some of the great Quakers and many of the young writers of to-day, there is a note of rebelliousness which, rather ironically in our time, cries, "Britains never shall be slaves." The English are far more revolutionary than many care to admit, and the history books are often more concerned with kings and generals than the defenders and apostles of liberty.

But there is another strand in English history, which has given her the name of the "nation of shopkeepers" and the paragon of *bourgeois* hypocrisy. It lies in the capacity to express the noblest sentiments and yet to extract the greatest advantage out of any situation. Stalin said in an interview to an American journalist that the British capitalists were the most elastic in the world. There is, however, behind the coldness of the British temperament a deep emotional element and there has been more than one occasion in history when the mass of Englishmen said, "Be damned to it! We won't stand for this!" A good example of this was the mass indignation over the Hoare-Laval Pact not so long ago. This blend of idealism and commercialism is strikingly illustrated in India. The British could not prevent Indians reading English history, and, as we have seen, the educational policy created rather than assuaged the national freedom movement. What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander, and Indians, too, came to feel that they should never be slaves.

The quotation from Sir Thomas Munro well illustrates the liberal tendency in the British, and he is not an isolated example. A readiness to apply the same standards to India as



to Britain was by no means uncommon in those earlier days. Civil servants were not afraid to strike out a line for themselves and even to criticise the Administration. In 1830 there was a proposal to navigate the River Indus and Sir Charles Metcalfe condemned it in the strongest terms:

It seems mere wantonness to vex and alarm our neighbours by surveying their lands and rivers by deceit or force without their consent. . . . The scheme of surveying the Indus under the pretence of sending a present to Maharaja Ranjit Singh seems to me highly objectionable. It is a trick in my opinion unworthy of our Government which cannot fail, when detected, as most probably it will be, to excite the jealousy and indignation of the powers on whom we play it.

Metcalfe's view did not prevail, but the fact that from a subordinate position he was able to criticise a proposal emanating from a high authority proves that there was less regimentation of opinion and uniformity than to-day. None will deny that reactionary policies were pursued, but there were always some who felt free to criticise them. Sir Frederick Halliday attacked the system of combining prosecuting and judicial powers in the same hands as affecting the "fair distribution of justice. . . . So long as it lasts, public confidence in our criminal tribunals must always be liable to injury, and the authority of justice itself must often be abused and misapplied."

Mr. Bool Chand, in an article in *Modern Review* for February, 1938, to which I am indebted, remarks that the administrative discussions of the period breathe a sense of responsibility and have a parliamentary ring about them. Officials do not seem to have suffered in their promotions for having adopted a critical attitude to the Government. Government reports and minutes do not give the impression of having been incubated in the same metal frame, but

"are living expressions of living minds, each with its own ideas and sentiments and sympathies." In its Report of 1854, the Torture Commission of Madras summed up that "the mental effect of the present system of British administration on the Indian was to make him look upon complaints as useless." Such impartiality is rare to-day, though one saw an instance of it in the recent Kiroo case, when a Chief Justice acquitted a man accused of having murdered a policeman on the grounds that the man had been foully tortured by the police and had only used self-defence.

I am confining myself here to the Services and do not discuss the early history of frank exploitation which may be studied in Marx's letters on India and Hutchinsons's *Empire of the Nabobs*, to mention but two books. It is impossible to avoid seeing the chicanery and sheer spoliation of the early days of British occupation, which helped to accumulate the capital which established the British *bourgeoisie* and industrialised England, or the subsequent period when England flooded India with cotton goods and ruined Indian handicrafts.<sup>1</sup>

But in the middle of the nineteenth century there came a tragic change in the character of British administration. From being more or less liberal in character, combining, when it could, its own interest with that of those over whom it ruled, it became manifestly a foreign domination. This change of spirit involved the elimination of the earlier freedom of thought. The Government became partisan, selfish, and generally hostile to Indian aspirations. We begin to see the picture of the "sun-dried bureaucrat."

<sup>1</sup> I cannot resist just mentioning the famous case which Marx quotes in *Capital*. A contract for opium was sold to one Sullivan, an officer of the Company. He sold his contract to a man named Binns for £40,000. Binns sold it the same day for £60,000, and the final purchaser who carried out the contract boasted that after all he had realised a huge gain. On British exploitation of India, cf. a devastating exposé in Leonard Barnes's *Skeleton of Empire* ("Fact" No. 3).

One of the ancestors of the "steel frame" was Cornwallis. Besides creating a new landlord class, he created a new governing class by deliberately excluding Indians from the highest posts. He wrote that "every native of Hindustan, I veritably believe, is corrupt."<sup>1</sup> Cornwallis seems to have been the forerunner of Lord Morley, whose distrust of "natives in positions of high responsibility" was undisguised.

But Cornwallis also animadverted on the corruption of English officials whom he suspected of "being deeply engaged in private trade." He tried to deal with corruption by the attraction of higher salaries, but he did not extend this to the Indian ranks. Very different from earlier officers (as we shall see), his knowledge of the country was limited and his insight into the character of the people was superficial. Ignorance was aggravated by lack of imaginative sympathy. Though he lived unostentatiously, Cornwallis began to increase that seclusion and lack of contact with the people which later became so general. "Cornwallis seems to have forgotten that for centuries prior to the introduction of the Western agency, law and justice had been administered solely by natives; yet society had been held together and there had been times when . . . India had been populous and flourishing, the people thriving and happy" (Mill and Wilson's *History of India*). This egregious belief in the incorruptibility of the British and the general venality of Indians has survived to this day among certain Englishmen, and I found an example of it recently in the case of a certain military official who assured me that India could never govern herself because the people were inherently dishonest!

Sir John Shore was narrower in his outlook than Cornwallis, and a contemporary described him as having a universal prejudice against the people of India. He, as in many

<sup>1</sup> Munro, however, said that the people of India were "simple, harmless, honest, and have as much truth in them as any men in the world."

other instances since, seems to have been regarded as a qualified person to govern India only by reason of his colossal ignorance of Indian life.

Wellesley, it is said, adopted the tone of a "hectoring schoolmaster" and excluded Indians from Government House functions at Calcutta. The English began to be affected by the caste system and Macaulay appropriately called the new class of conquerors the "new breed of Brahmins."

Lord William Bentinck was a different proposition. He reduced salaries and was incessantly abused for his attempts at economy, despite the fact that he still left each civilian on an average about £2,200 a year! Bentinck was sympathetic to the freedom of the Press and was anxious to open up avenues of employment to Indians from which Cornwallis's policy had excluded them. Metcalfe remarked of Bentinck's administration: "Were he asked whether the increased happiness of our subjects was proportionate to the heavier expenses of our establishment, he should be obliged to answer according to his belief in the negative; for we were foreign conquerors, against whom the antipathy of the native subjects naturally prevailed. We held the country solely by force and by force alone could we maintain it." "It was an honest grief to him (Bentinck) to think, that he was regarded as the greatest jailer-general in the world" (Torrens). Bentinck is famous for his humanitarian measures, but still more for his educational policy, to which we have already referred (Chapter Three).

The event which had heralded the new bureaucracy was, of course, the Mutiny. English historians generally regard it as a military revolt, but to Indians it was the first war of independence. Whether it was organised or a series of local outbreaks is a moot point, but it produced upon the minds of Englishmen a deep impression. It became to the ordinary

man a veritable orgy of bloodshed and murder and it perverted his whole outlook on India. I hope that to-day those in charge of English schools will purge their textbooks of one-sided references to this dark period. Even Ruskin, so beloved of Gandhi, displays the warped outlook which seemed general. He said, "Since the race of man began its course of sin on this earth, nothing has ever been done so significative of all bestial, and lower than bestial, degradations as the acts of the Indian race in the year just passed by." The Mutiny, says Professor J. T. George, has been mainly responsible "for the intellectual constipation, the mental astigmatism, and the racial delirium of some of the people residing in India" (*The Briton in India*). I will not go into the question of the brutal reprisals which were taken after the Mutiny. The whole matter has been excellently dealt with by Edward Thompson in *The Other Side of the Medal*. One wishes that this book might be read in English schools. It would do much to change the attitude of the average Englishman to India.<sup>1</sup> Horrible stories, some true, some false, were spread in England about the rising, and the slender thread of mutual understanding in India was either snapped or suppressed.

It was perhaps Sir James Stephen who gave expression to the new policy. He created the technique of the "maintenance of British rule in India," and whenever there was a question of formulating a new policy it was done on the basis of "India's true interests." All criticism by functionaries was suppressed on the plea that it was antagonistic to British rule. The strain of self-criticism vanished and Government reports became increasingly reactionary in tone. They became dogmatic and administration began to be a matter of giving commands without the necessity of having to justify them to

<sup>1</sup> One writer has compared the reprisals to Cromwell's decimations in Ireland. Unhappy prisoners were hanged, blown from guns and in some cases burnt alive. Cf. Thompson, *op. cit.*, and Garret and Thompson, *Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India*.

anyone. Montagu, when Secretary of State, repeatedly made reference to this bureaucratic disease. "The I.C.S. has been so long accustomed to state their conclusions without reasoning them."

It is not difficult to see the cause of this change of spirit. Indian Nationalism had grown apace and, as the political consciousness of the people increased, the necessity for reactionary administration became clear. British administration had inevitably become a machinery for repression. As long as there was a period of territorial expansion in India liberal sentiments were no danger, but, as a real demand for independence seemed likely, a very different complexion was put on the matter. The Mutiny frightened the British and made them feel that they were less secure than they had supposed. Any internal differences in the administration or show of sympathy for Indian aspirations might encourage the people and, after all, nationalists and Socialists are not the only people who can make a "united front"! None has succeeded better in this than the Government of India! It was in the period after the Mutiny that there developed the *esprit de corps* which has made the Indian Service such a remarkable caste, such as even to-day in many respects it remains. It is true that Indians have entered it in increasing numbers, but they have been trained in the ways of the bureaucracy and only too often have not represented the more independent elements in the middle class. Only a few months ago a brilliant Cambridge Indian was refused admission to the I.C.S. examination because "it was prejudicial to the interests of the Service." Whether this was due to the fact that he had been to prison like almost all the present Ministers in several provinces, one cannot tell.

The coming of provincial autonomy has made a real difference. To some extent the ministries represent the will of the people, and to some degree the I.C.S. have to take their

orders. It is piquant to find an ex-jailbird now controlling the police. It is worth noting that there has been no tendency to pay back old scores; in Madras the Premier has said that his relations with the service are most cordial, though some of the Leftists would regard this statement somewhat suspiciously. The Chief Secretary of Madras (English) and the Governor of C.P. have accepted gifts of *khaddar* cloth and worn it. The services have proved themselves more elastic than many thought possible, but one cannot change "satraps of empire" into servants of the people all in a day! The response of a civil service to technical changes in most countries has been more rapid than its response to changes of political outlook in the Government itself, but there are evidences of a growing respect for the Congress as it sets itself energetically to the task of cleaning the Augean stable that 150 years of British rule have not prevented India from becoming. That there are officials who love the country is undeniable and they do their work with admirable efficiency. I remember meeting a forestry officer who told me that he loved his work so well that even if the time came when his salary might be seriously docked he would not be ready to abandon it; and an irrigation officer remarked that he was thrilled with the new régime because it had enthusiastically welcomed a project for a new dam that he had never succeeded in getting passed before.

The symbol of the aloofness of the official hitherto has been the annual migration to the Hills, where in serene isolation he cons his files. The amazing Captain Ellam, in his book, *Swaraj*, even went so far as to suggest that all Europeans should take to the Hills for good and thus avoid both the climate of the Plains and any intercourse with the people of the country or those "agitators." But to-day the ministries in the provinces are banning the sojourn in the Hills, except for a holiday (most welcome in the blazing heat of May or

June!), and even the Central Government is limiting the exodus to Simla. If we grant that there have been and still are admirable men in the Services and that they are genuinely trying both to help and serve their new masters in the Provinces<sup>1</sup> (though there may be some evidence to the contrary), there is still one very serious indictment that has to be made.

## 2

I recall a dear friend of mine, who died serving India's poor, remarking that the main condemnation of British rule, all other things being considered, was that it was so "damnably expensive."<sup>2</sup> A few comparative figures may be illuminating and shocking as well. I have left them in rupees, but, for comparative purposes, rupees per month may be taken as a very rough equivalent of pounds per year. First let us take for purpose of contrast an Asiatic country—Japan. The Prime Minister receives Rs.622 per month; the Premier of Bengal, which has less than half the population of the Japanese Empire, gets Rs.3,000.

Other Japanese Ministers receive Rs.440 and secretaries Rs.375; the Chief Secretary of Orissa, in India, receives Rs.2,150, and of Bengal Rs.5,333.

The Governor-General of Korea gets Rs.440; the Governor of Punjab Rs.8,333. A Japanese official may receive Rs.334; a district magistrate of Bombay, Rs.1,150. One may add that, according to size, the Bengal Premier should receive half the salary of the Prime Minister of Japan, but

<sup>1</sup> The younger generation of I.C.S. men contain many who are Liberal or even mildly Socialist in outlook, but they are snowed under with files, limited by established procedure, but still in some instances wish to do what they can, but they meet with suspicion of their motives. One man remarked to me laughingly, "Had Mussolini been in the I.C.S., he would have had no time or desire to conquer Abyssinia!"

<sup>2</sup> "A Rolls-Royce administration in a bullock-cart country."



## THE PRESENT CONDITION OF INDIA

in actual fact he receives four times as much. The total number of officers in the various services in Bengal amounts to 399; they receive an average of Rs.1,301 monthly each. Whatever may be said of Japanese Imperialism, I have not heard that corruption and bribery are more prevalent there than elsewhere.

Let us take another example, this time from Europe. Poland is far richer than the Indian province of Behar and its population is considerably less. Yet the President of the Republic receives only Rs.1,560 monthly, while the Governor of Behar gets Rs.8,333. Even district magistrates in India may receive a higher salary than the President of Poland. In Poland not more than thirteen officers receive a salary of above Rs.1,000, while in Behar and Orissa there are as many as 156 officers with a salary of over Rs.1,000.

Still more amazing is a contrast between India and U.S.A. America is enormously rich. The *per capita* income is more than twenty-two times that of India and the cost of living is notoriously high. If the income of officials should be proportionate to that of the people, Indian salaries should be about one twenty-third that of American officials, but what are the facts? Skilled workers in U.S.A. can demand Rs.300-450 a month, according to the 1935-6 statistics. We have already examined the figures for the Indian workers. Again, the population of U.S.A. is smaller than that of India, while the revenues are ten times as great. It would not be unfair to compare a person so important as the President of the United States with the Viceroy of India. The President draws as salary Rs.17,062 per month; the Viceroy, Rs.21,333. An American Cabinet Minister receives Rs.3,412; a member of the Viceroy's Council, Rs.6,667. The Governor of New York State receives Rs.5,687; the Governor of C.P. (India), Rs.6,000. The Governor of South Dakota receives Rs.682; the Chief Commissioner of

Delhi, Rs.3,000. An American Chief Justice gets Rs.4,550; a Bengal Chief Justice, Rs.6,000.

To clinch these comparisons, let us turn to England. Its population is 12 per cent. that of India. Its revenue receipts are 317 per cent. higher than the budget estimate of the Government of India for 1936-7. The Prime Minister receives half the salary of the Viceroy. Out of every Rs.1,000 collected, the Viceroy draws 1 rupee. Out of every Rs.100,000 collected in England, the Prime Minister gets 1 rupee. On this basis the Viceroy gets ten times as much. The highest salary of an English civil servant is Rs.3,333 (a very few) and the majority will be satisfied with Rs.777-1,000. A Cabinet Minister receives Rs.5,555. Compare these figures to those from India given above. Of course to-day many of these salaries are received by Indians, who form about 50 per cent. of the I.C.S.

To all this we may add the enormous expense of the Army in India. It is clear from K. T. Shah's *Federal Structure* that Defence swallows up more than 60 per cent. of the budget allowances of the central Government. The Defence Budget and the Debt Charges, making 76 per cent. of the total Budget, are not subject to control by any Indian Legislature. Even in the provinces, under the new Autonomy, I am told by an official, three-quarters of the revenues cannot be touched. The extravagance of the Army beggars description. I am not referring to the Indian Army so much as the British "Army of Occupation." A few years ago I was given to understand that in one district there was one bed to every ten British soldiers as compared to one bed for every 50,000 of the general population in the hospitals. In one garrison town there are hospitals for officers, men, women and children and a veterinary hospital. I stayed here with the Chaplain. He pointed out a rather fine-looking church almost next-door to his. It had been built for a Scotch

regiment (Presbyterians) and as they were no longer there this large building remained disused. An honest man, he told me frankly how he hated the exalted standard of living which was expected of him as a Government chaplain. He travelled first-class with a servant, for which he was able to draw a travelling allowance. He told me that the custom of drawing allowances for unnecessary travelling was far too common.

A senior chaplain draws Rs.1,450 and a junior chaplain Rs.800-900. A bishop, I think, gets about Rs.5,000. (Of course, many bishops in India are missionary bishops and nothing to do with Government; their salaries will, no doubt, be much less.) Many chaplains seem to accept the general values of "Anglo-India" and have little or nothing to do with the Indian population. What I have to say in the following section would be fairly true of these ministers of the Gospel as well! But the appalling feature of this aspect of things is that the poor masses of India have to pay for the "spiritual" welfare of English soldiers and this item of expenditure is a "reserved subject," which no Indian Ministers under the Constitution may touch. Surely it is not unjust to demand that, if England wishes to assure the British soldier the "benefits of religion," she should pay for it and not charge it up to the Hindus and Muslims of India!

### 3

The odd social habits of Anglo-India have often been written about and I do not think that there is need to add much to the spate of literature from Thackeray to Forster on the subject.

In the early days of the British occupation civilians took a serious interest in Indian culture. Forced by the exigencies of transport in those days, when it might take six months

to get to England, they settled down in the country and had a more or less friendly intercourse with its people. Many of them delighted in smoking the *hookah* and in wearing the pleasant clothing of the land. Some even became learned in the language and philosophy of India. A great example of this was Sir William Jones, who wrote that his principal amusements were "botany and conversation with Pundits." He became fascinated with Indian culture, learning Sanskrit and Arabic. A modern civilian would be astounded to hear him saying that he had "more Brahmin teachers than I can find time to hear." Many Europeans in India to-day know no more of the vernacular than they have occasion to use in giving orders to their servants, not always too politely, and as for Sanskrit! . . . Jones wrote to Cornwallis, "I never was unhappy in England, it was not in my nature to be so, but I never was happy till I was settled in India." "I would rather be a valetudinarian all my life than leave unexplored the Sanskrit mine which I have just opened."

During the whole of the eighteenth century and part of the nineteenth the bane of racialism seemed absent in Anglo-Indian relationships. The English merchants had to settle down side by side with the astute merchants of Bombay and Surat, while many Englishmen found the Mogul Court very much to their taste!

Sir Edwin Arnold glowingly described Buddhism in his *Light of Asia*, and his farewell poem to India, though it breathes a certain Victorian unction and is of no great literary excellence, is full of affection for the country and sorrow at leaving it and "its people of the sun":

*Gentle, soft-mannered, by a kind word won. . . .  
Must it seem too great for one man's heart  
To say it holds so many Indian sisters dear, so many  
Indian brothers? . . .*

Recently a high official, whom I had the pleasure of knowing and who had many Indian friends, wrote in an Indian review his regrets at leaving the country.

Jones and Arnold, and even moderns like Curzon and Ronaldshay (Zetland), have been fascinated by the appeal of Indian culture. But only too often charlatans and philistines have followed in the steps of Macaulay, who was supremely contemptuous of Indian culture. Like so many Englishmen since, who pine for England, he writes: "All the fruits of the tropics are not worth a pottle of Covent Garden" nor the palaces of Calcutta "equal to a garret in a London street." He admitted once that he had not spent a single happy day since he left England. What a contrast to William Jones!

The lordliness of the conqueror is always unpleasant, but the complacency of the Englishman in India when one sees it against the background of India's serried past is ironic indeed. His culture seems then a little puny, and one may dare add that the nadir of English culture can be found in the drawing-rooms of Anglo-India, where all the pettiness of suburbia combines with the shibboleths of the smaller public schools. Folly kept in its place at home is magnified to intensity. Things may be improving a little, but in the military cantonments life goes on unchanged save for cock-tails and the wireless. Memsahibs, chits and *bundobusts* still abound, as does the *chota* peg. Indians are less frequently called "native," but I am told that one can still hear references to the "Aryan brother" in the clubs of Calcutta. Arrogance and bad manners in railway trains are rarer than they were, but I was witness of a shocking case as late as 1931. The English home remains aloof in India still for the most part. It is only fair to say that it is not easy for the average Britisher to get into touch with an Indian family or share its life without both feeling

uncomfortable, but there are splendid exceptions. If only the English would follow the example of their forbears and wear Indian dress, the effect would be excellent! It breaks down barriers in a very real way and it is most suitable for the climate. I pity the Englishman in his dinner-jacket with the temperature at well over 100° as I put on a fresh white *dhoti* and shawl.

I had the amusing experience of staying in a hotel with English people when I had nothing but Indian clothes with me. A military official solemnly took me to task for letting down the white man's prestige (this in 1938). He asked me severely did I not think that, taken man for man, the English were a superior race to the Indian? It was hard not to laugh; he was a paunchy, prosy little man. I could not help thinking of innumerable Indian friends. . . .

But the pretensions of the British have ceased to have any terrors for the Indian. He has discovered that in the strong gale of healthy ridicule even the most obstinate superiority gets a bit battered. There are still clubs which exclude Indians, but many sensible people prefer Indian company and find it more interesting. The sense of disgust which seems to animate many Englishmen in India may be provoked by the dirt and poverty only too common and the fatalism and gentleness of so many of the people. The Englishman likes to be stood up to, and the new Indian, who looks him straight in the face, who has lost all trace of obsequiousness, who throws his Bills out of the Assembly and makes sly cartoons of him in the Press, but who still is ready to pour out love and kindness upon a friendly foreigner, may yet gain the respect of the English, if he has not already done so. We shall hear no more talk of "naked fakirs." The Anglo-Indian Press now bills and coos like a dove.

Lord Irwin, despite the troubled term of his office, gained

the liking of Indians as had no Viceroy, with the exception of Lord Ripon. He began to give up the prestige bogey, and Lord Linlithgow has carried on the process. He has invited Mr. Gandhi on more than one occasion to meet him and discuss matters; there is more readiness to admit mistakes. As an example, one may take the recent crisis in Orissa, where it was decided that an I.C.S. official of the province should deputise for the Governor when he took leave. The Congress Ministers threatened to resign on the basis that it was derogatory to the dignity of the Government to have over them as Governor an erstwhile servant of the Government, and, after a short delay, it was announced that the Governor had cancelled his leave. Similarly, the recent resignations of the ministries in U.P. and Behar were met with conciliatory measures on the part of the Government and Whitehall only equalled by the cautious tactics of the Mahatma. One is inclined to think that the British respect the Indian for insisting on the full rights and dignities of the new provincial governments. The Congress still bans social contact with Governors or other officials on the part of Congressmen, but I doubt whether this will last long. Of course, the Left attacks any kind of concession to the Imperialist.

But the racial virus is by no means expunged. We criticise Nazi "racial biology," but there are unpleasant echoes of it in India. The caste system seems to have got into the Englishman's blood in that country. I shall not dwell on this unpleasant aspect of Indo-British relations, for racialism feeds upon criticism and the best way of dealing with it is to refuse to accept its premises and laugh at it whenever possible. But race prejudice has in India created a community and perpetrated a crime which can hardly be equalled elsewhere. I refer to the Eurasian community, now known as Anglo-Indians.

We have seen how in former times Englishmen settled down in India; they often formed unions legal or illegal with the Mogul aristocracy and with others; only too often these unions were little more than concubinage. The fruits of these unions were in no sense looked down upon and many of them undertook work of great responsibility. But after the Mutiny the Anglo-Indian was segregated and treated in a very strange way. He was taught to despise and look down upon the Indian; he was educated in the English manner, but he was rarely given the opportunity of higher education, generally becoming a worker on the railway or something of the kind. An Anglo-Indian friend tells me that he was educated at a school in Calcutta which had a great reputation—many distinguished Bengalis received their education there—but it received no assistance from Government, because it was said that it was not following the accepted policy in regard to Anglo-Indian education. It is still very hard for an Anglo-Indian boy to get higher education.

The position of this community to-day is tragic indeed. Taught from childhood to look to England for inspiration, with a great record of unflinching loyalty to English interests, it has lost the sense of belonging to the soil—aliens in their own land, but the British do not accept them; they despise them and often vilify them. Give a dog a bad name and it sticks.

The problem of the Untouchable in India, though different in degree, has not been so different in kind from that of the Anglo-Indian. The latter compensates for his sense of inferiority by pretending to despise the Indian. The existence of this tragic buffer between the two races has helped to increase racial antagonism. The striking thing is that the children of a mixed marriage in these days, who are brought up as Indians and accepted in



Indian society, are in quite a different category. They cannot be said to belong to the Anglo-Indian community, which has a definite social and historical determination. The leaders of the community to-day are beginning to show a commendable sense of realism and are bidding the Anglo-Indian identify himself increasingly with Indian interests. The Britisher will never accept him; in time the Indian will do so. His economic condition is deplorable, and I am told that in Calcutta Anglo-Indians live an appalling existence, trying to maintain a European standard of living on a less than adequate income. The British to a great extent have abandoned this offspring of theirs. Let us hope that Indians will give them an opportunity to enter fully into the national life, if they are ready to do so. There are many men of high calibre among them, but their chances of a normal psychological life have not been great.

There has been an attempt made in England to collect money for Anglo-Indian schools. These are generally run by ecclesiastical interests, and one would ask the latter whether, by isolating the Anglo-Indian and giving him a European education (sometimes they know no vernacular), they may not be doing him a great disservice. If they are to merge into the Indian population, they must be educated in the same way. Racism is a world phenomenon and part of that innate tribalism which rejects elements which are strange or which do not conform to type. Only Socialism and the purest religion seem able to transcend race.

I have said nothing of the various types of European in India. Besides the civilians and the military there are the business men. The tea plantations and the jute industry are mainly in British hands, and in the large cities there are many retail and wholesale firms. In Bombay there is a good deal of mixing; the younger business men started a luncheon

club during the civil disobedience movement to try to understand the nationalist point of view. This would have been impossible in Calcutta, but in Bombay Indian industry predominates and in Calcutta British; this makes a very great difference. The British seem able to get on well with the Parsees of Bombay. The *box-wallahs* are rather looked down on by the upper British caste in India and live their own life. I am told that young men come out to business firms, and are often made to live at a far higher standard than they can afford and are often led into profligacy by older men. Toc H seems to have done useful work with these young men in Calcutta, but their contacts with Indians are scanty.

The police come in for much criticism. Their job is certainly thankless, but it must be said that they could avoid much trouble if they understood Indian psychology better. That there is corruption in the force is certain. Most people seem to hate and fear the police. It is a great advantage that they have come under the control of relatively popular ministries in the Provinces. But under existing conditions they are inevitably a repressive agent.

One of the major problems of a foreign army is the enforced celibacy of many private soldiers. The Army does not officially countenance brothels, but many actually exist. In Jubbulpore a few years ago a soldier raped a village girl and was beaten up by the villagers; the soldiers took their revenge by attacking a whole village, *but* it was the wrong one! It is only fair to add that they were severely punished. The English soldier generally is a decent fellow, interested mostly in sport, but he is taught to regard himself as superior, and is, of course, strictly segregated. That ordinary working men should be taken and made to live an unnatural life in the tropics is bad, and the evil of an army of occupation is as bad for the occupiers as the victims.

It is right to say a word about one important section of the non-Indian population, namely the missionaries. Apart from the British, they are of many nationalities, but Americans are in the majority. It is difficult in a short note to deal with the very complicated question of missions. Suffice it to say that there are among the missionaries devoted men and women who have gained the affection and admiration of Indians, and there can be no question that mission schools and institutions have sent forth some of the leaders of India to-day. Such a man as C. F. Andrews alone would make missionaries trusted, but it is worth remembering that for the greater part of his life in India he has been out of organic relationship with missions and identified himself with India in a way that few foreigners have done.

There have been some missionaries who have given themselves to practical work, such as that at Moga or Asansol; they are a most varied collection. In the mission colleges men of culture and broad sympathies have won the love of generations of students, and there are missionaries who have lived lives of sacrificial service and even given their lives for India; they have tended the poor and despised and stimulated the new attitude to them which is beginning to permeate India.

But having said this, one must add that among the missionaries there are some peculiarly fanatical and illiberal persons and not a few who are linked up with official interests and seek Government recognition. It has been very difficult for the missionaries to escape the insidious effects of their relation to the ruling race: Some have been guilty of deeply-rooted race feeling and have shared a sense of superiority and of contempt towards the Indian. For a large number their work has been limited to the lowest of the people and they have tended to judge India by them. Indians have never forgotten some of the missionaries who burnt themselves out

for India, but their gratitude and affection has not always been received in the right spirit. There has been a tendency for missionaries to return to their own land and to exploit the weaknesses and faults of India to-day in order to get sympathy and to raise money for their work. Under the fire of constant criticism from educated Indians, this is getting less common now. Missionaries are being criticised by Christian and non-Christian alike. The non-Christian criticises them for their tendency to be exclusively concerned with winning converts, even when converts have no adequate experience of full conviction, and to be less than just to the good things in other traditions than their own. I remember some years ago a Hindu journal bitterly referring to "theocratic imperialism." So the useful service offered by hospitals, schools and educational institutions is vitiated by the conscious subordination of it to the purposes of proselytism. Many Hindus have deeply resented the eagerness which some missionaries have shown recently in cultivating Dr. Ambedkar (the Untouchable leader), as an instance of the missionary attitude that the difficulties of Hinduism are his opportunity. There is far too much talk of missionary "fronts" and military metaphors for mission work.

Missionaries are also criticised for a certain aggressiveness and lack of simplicity in comparison with the simplicity and humility which India has traditionally looked for in her holy men. Nationalists and Socialists criticise the missionaries for their only too frequent lack of sympathy with Indian aspirations. Americans can take shelter behind the neutrality pledge which they are made to offer, but this is no justification for silence when there is need for outspokenness; still less is there excuse for British missionaries in this respect. When one or two missionaries spoke out in indignation during the "troubles" of 1930-2 they were only too often disowned or even betrayed by their fellow-missionaries.

Elsewhere I have quoted some cases of "Christian" utterances. It seems forgotten that political questions are at bottom moral questions and a Christian cannot avoid judgment on issues raised by the exploitation of one people by another or foreign domination. The missionary preaches the justice and love of God and yet incongruously keeps silence in the presence of situations which are a direct violation of his preaching. Rather than compromise with evil when they see it, it is better that missionaries should resign and go home.

Missionaries have only too often failed to observe even neutrality, but have been ready to pay courtesy calls on officials and to bask in the sunshine of Government patronage. There are far more missionaries who attend parties at Government House and other such functions than there are those who have close contacts with nationally-minded Indians, especially if they are Congressmen. Missionaries generally read the European-edited papers, which have a bias towards the *status quo*. A distinguished Indian Christian has expressed much of the above criticism to me, and I know that it is common. The Indian Christian attitude to the missionary is complicated by the fact that only too often it is a relation of employer to employee; the missionary, being the paymaster and initiator of policy, does not always show his best side to the Indian worker. Indian Christians complain that only too often there is no real comradeship between missionaries and their Indian co-workers. Missionaries are inclined to think they have everything to give and nothing to learn, and criticism is not appreciated. Neither on the spiritual plane nor in material things is there too commonly real sharing between the missionary and Indian Christians. The poverty of the Indian Christians and their dependence on the missions are unhappy factors in the situation. Only too often missionaries are surrounded by

penurious and fawning people and it is hard for them not to become either cynical or domineering.

There has undoubtedly been much searching of heart of late, and many missionaries are trying to get closer to the heart of India and to overcome the obstacles of out-of-date methods, large bungalows and inherited traditions. The *ashrams* where Indian and foreigner are trying to live a simple common life and be of use to the people round them are undoubtedly an improvement, but it is no good saying that missionaries are generally looked upon with affection, for they are not. It will be a long time before they can win again the trust and love of the people.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. also p. 181, *et seq.*

## CHAPTER SIX

### MAZHAB<sup>1</sup>

*"Religion does not teach us to bear ill-will towards one another."*

From a couplet by MAHOMED IQBAL

IN OUR TOWN in the north there has been a communal riot. At the street corners there are soldiers or policemen and a curfew order has been issued; no one may go out after 8 p.m. All the shops are boarded up and frightened Hindu *banias* cower behind the shutters, from time to time ringing up the police station for an army to guard them. The dark streets are strangely sinister; the normal friendly life has departed from them. On a seat sits a Muslim butcher with his knife glittering in what seems a horribly significant manner as he holds it on his lap like a mother holds a child. For seven long days the terror reigns. Food is short, because the shopkeepers will not open their shops. All business is stopped.

How did it all start? Nobody seems to know aright. Some hooligans attacked a Hindu wedding party just at the time of Muharram, when the Muslims organize processions in memory of the slain Hussain and weep and beat drums. Then this year Muharram almost coincided with Holi, the merry Hindu spring festival, and that always means trouble. At Holi everyone forgathers in the streets in an uproarious fashion, and it is the custom to sprinkle one another with various colours till the clothes are saturated; this amid much rough horse-play. Often Muslims participate in the fun, but feelings were strained. A cleanly dressed Muslim objects to the colour thrown on him, there is an altercation,

<sup>1</sup> *Mazhab* = religion.

a crowd gathers, someone draws a knife. Then the trouble begins, infinitely magnified by rumour.

Rumour is a terrible thing in an Indian city. In a short time the most fantastic stories are abroad and the population is in a panic. The crowd of an Indian city is naturally gentle enough, but it is easily excited. The result of all this: twelve killed and fifty injured! But this is nothing compared to the great riots in Bombay and Cawnpore. In the latter city, in 1931, 400 were killed, 1,200 were wounded, 500 houses were burnt, and at least twenty *lakhs* of movable property were destroyed. We must go more deeply into the causes of what has come to be known in India as "communalism." It is an unhappy feature of the contemporary scene, only too well known in England, where the slightest communal unrest is reported until the average Englishman is convinced that only the force of British arms keeps Indians from flying at one another's throats. Let us first examine the religious aspect of the matter.

Brahmanic Hinduism has never been a system of creeds or intellectual acceptance, but it has flowed into a number of forms and institutions of great antiquity. On the philosophical side, it has ranged from the lowest forms of animism to the highest reaches of pantheistic and monistic philosophy. It has included the most elaborate ceremonial observances—all the pagan pomp and glitter that one may see in the temples of South India—and the barest individualistic soul-culture. It has fostered a high culture and yet not prevented at times the most sordid barbarism. It is amazingly vague and tolerant of racial, mental and cultural differences. It is synthetic rather than critical. What is it that holds this amazing system together?

It is a three-fold strand of birth, tradition and country. Tradition prescribes rules for dealing with all the ordinary occasions of life and often enough accepted without enquiry.



It has never been particularly dogmatic; its customs and institutions have been maintained not through any static or clear dogmatic conclusions, but through the medium of an unchanging social environment. Where the essence of a religion lies in an emotional or intellectual acceptance of a dogmatic position, of Christ as Redeemer and Lord, in the unity of God or the prophet-character of Mahommed, birth can be no restriction on an intending convert, for the only basis for conversion is the acceptance of the belief, and its transmutation into a pattern of living. But in a system like Hinduism, which lays down no formula of belief and lives by ancient tradition alone, birth becomes a highly important consideration. Only those fitted by heredity can enter into a carefully graded status in the Aryan-Brahmanical religion. "One, who is not to the manner born, may indeed imitate the externalities of the religious culture, but he cannot spiritually affiliate himself to it unless he has received by hereditary transmission impulses, reflexes and instincts congenial to it. The whole system is dominated by the idea of heredity" (Dutt, *Indian Nationality*). This is certainly restrictive, but it is also a fact that, by faked ancestries and legends of origin, various communities have been received into Hinduism which were originally outside it. Foreign communities have managed to attain a Brahmanical birth-right, and this is a precondition for imbibing its culture.

The third great factor in Brahmanism is *patria*. With the exception, possibly, of Shinto, no religious system is so bound up with the land of its origin as Hinduism.<sup>1</sup> Other religions regard the land of origin as a place of pilgrimage, but for the Hindu the very soil has a special virtue. Thus,

<sup>1</sup> It is a sign of its age; cp. early Hebrews. God could only be worshipped on his own ground. Naaman had to carry away Palestinian soil to worship God in a foreign land.

the "twice-born" castes are forbidden by the Laws of Manu to leave the country. It is the Hindu culture which sanctifies the land and makes it fit for dwelling in. The conception expanded with the geographical dispersion of Aryan culture till it included the whole continent. It found its ideal expression in the network of shrines and temples all over the country, which knit it into a cultural unit. This ideal unity of India was furthered by the institution of pilgrimage, which developed "the geographical sense in the people, which enables them to think and feel that India is not a mere congeries of geographical fragments, but a single though immense organism filled with the tide of one pulsating life from end to end" (R. K. Mookerji, *Nationalism in Hindu Culture*). This attitude to the country is not the nationalism of the European—the Englishman's sense of the "storied past" of his little island nor the Frenchman's love of the material soil, of an extended space on the globe. It is the love of the land as a sacrament of a culture which it embodies.

In the eleventh and twelfth centuries A.D. the indigenous system of India was brought face to face with a system which it could not assimilate and with which it could not compromise. Islam brought to India the alien traditions of mid-Asia and its face was turned to Mecca. The Muslim invaders brought with them a concrete and historic faith which had had a distinguished past for three centuries before its introduction into India. They tended to regard India not as a home at first, but as a conquered country. It is true that in the south, Muslim merchants had achieved an economic conquest to some extent and increased their numbers peacefully by the conversion of the rejected of Hinduism, just as is happening in the case of the Christian Church to-day.

In the twelfth century, and up to the establishment of

the Sultanate of Delhi in 1340, Hindu society suffered not a little from the depredations of the Mohammedans. But there is little evidence to show what were the feelings of the Hindus during this period of conquest, though the chroniclers of Rajputana called their enemies "Asuras," i.e. the traditional foes of the Aryan gods. The assured position of the invaders prevented their assimilation into the Brahmanical system like the Sakas or Huns, and established their separateness, and, oddly enough, it safeguarded the Brahmanical polity and prevented its dissolution. This separateness was established by the lack of any necessity to compromise with the Hindu polity. As conquerors and governors, they seized the capital cities, maintained in splendour provincial courts, gathered taxes and revenues, built gorgeous palaces and mosques. It was a purely military and administrative rule; they formed a kind of military aristocracy. It carried on the traditions of mid-Asia, and was far removed from the constitutional monarchies and popular republics of an earlier India. But as we have seen, it left intact the traditional social and religious polity of India, which was carried on in village communities far away from the disturbances of political conquests. This may explain the fact that the Muslim rule in India produced relatively little social discord, and one must also add the fact that till the time of Aurungzeb it was extraordinarily tolerant. For instance, it was forbidden to kill cows promiscuously out of deference to Hindu sentiment.

When this policy was reversed, a letter of protest was sent to Aurungzeb:—"If your majesty places any faith in those books by distinction called divine, you will there be instructed that God is the God of all mankind, not the God of the Mohammedans alone. The Pagan and the Mussulman are equally in His Presence. Distinctions of colour are of His ordination. It is He who gives existence.

In your temples, to His Name the voice is raised in prayer; in a house of images, when the bell is shaken, still He is the object of adoration. To vilify the religion or customs of other men is to set at naught the pleasure of the Almighty."

This rather noble passage gives us a hint at the evolution of a train of ideas which had resulted from Hindu-Muslim relations. In their social life the two communities remained apart, but in their speculative thought there was considerable compromise. Ramananda and his disciple Kabir (fourteenth century) are examples. Kabir was a Muslim weaver who founded a sect which still survives, and which claimed to be the children of Allah and Rama. Kabir was the ancestor of Nanak, who founded the sect of the Sikhs. Though the latter were driven later into enmity towards the Muslims, their faith was essentially a compromise between the doctrines of Hinduism and Islam. The spirit of compromise is seen later in the "Din Elahi" of Akbar. Havell thinks that the Brahman began to shape the metaphysics of Islam to guide its statecraft and to reconcile racial and social antipathies by bringing it into the Hindu synthesis, while the Hindus began to concentrate on the idea of unity of the Godhead. The Advaita philosophy of Sankaracharya was "the Brahmanical statement of Mohammed's formula, 'There is no God but Allah.'" One may refer also to the far more positively monotheistic philosophy of Ramanuja, and the cult of Satya-Narayana, the Muslim become Hindu deity, who preaches religious unity. The bigotry of Aurungzeb undoubtedly left a bitterness which still exists. It is only fair to say that his policy may have been the result of a sense of the weakening of Muslim rule.

The advent of British rule turned Hindu-Muslim relations into a more political channel, though in the nineteenth century some have thought that an increasing fanaticism

entered into Indian Islam through the influence of the puritan Wahabis of Arabia. It is interesting that there should have been controversy as to whether the name of the Emperor of India or the Caliph should be used in the prayers. Those who took the latter view were naturally anti-British. As we shall see, the fanaticism was often retained and the anti-British feeling discarded. Both Hindus and Muslims took part in the Mutiny. In the earlier days of British rule it was the Muslims who were especially hostile, as was to be expected of a conquered ruling race. A writer signing his name "Carnaticus" remarked in the *Asiatic Journal* of 1821: "*Divide et impera* should be the motto for our Indian administration," and Lieutenant Coke likewise pronounced that "our endeavour should be to uphold in full force the (for us, fortunate) separation which exists between the different religions and races; not to endeavour to amalgamate them." Both he and Elphinstone (in a minute of May 14th, 1858) agree with the principle of "divide and rule." Then it was the Hindu who had to be cajoled. Lord Ellenborough wrote in 1843: "I cannot close my eyes to the belief that this race (Mussulmans) is fundamentally hostile to us and therefore our true policy is to conciliate the Hindus." Again, in reference to the plan to restore the gates of the temple at Somnath, he remarks: "Hindus, on the other hand, are delighted. It seems to me most unwise, when we are sure of the hostility of the one-tenth, not to secure the enthusiastic support of the nine-tenths which are faithful."

The abolition of Persian led to a divergence in education between the two communities. The Muslims held themselves aloof from the new English education. Preference was given by Lord Hardinge in 1844 to those with Western education, and this led to Muslims being ousted from Government posts and their places being filled by Hindus. The Mutiny turned out to be more disastrous for Muslims than Hindus. The

Arya Samaj, in its aggressive zeal for a "protestant" Hindu revival, may also have alarmed the Muslims.

But when Sir Syed Ahmed founded the Muslim College at Aligarh in 1875, with the blessing of Government, he spoke of the two communities as the two eyes of India, and insisted that all persons who resided in India belonged to "one and the same nation," but, after standing aloof from the newly founded Congress for three years, he declared against it and, in the face of the increasing militancy of Hindu nationalism, the Government was forced to adopt new tactics. It began to pose as the friend of the minorities and their real champion.

While Hindus had received English education from 1818, the Muslims only began it in 1875, and during this period many links of common culture had been destroyed. New links had unified the Hindus, but these merely intensified the aloofness of the Muslims. They began to feel weak and their dependence upon Government increased. Furthermore, the diversion of their energies into communal channels made them prone to pan-Islamic influence. A reform movement developed in Islam as aggressive as the Arya Samaj. In 1900 an order was issued authorising the Nagri script in the courts and public offices of U.P., and this further divided the communities. The quarrel over the relative merits of Nagri and Urdu scripts still persists, as we shall see.

The partition of Bengal divided that province into a Muslim and a Hindu section. The *Statesman* of Calcutta wrote that its objects, among other things, was "to foster in Eastern Bengal the growth of a Mohammedan power, which, it is hoped, will have the effect of keeping in check the rapidly growing strength of the educated Hindu community." The agitation against the partition, as we have seen, greatly developed nationalist agitation, but it also widened the gulf between Hindu and Muslim. Encouraged by their new strength, the Muslims thought that they had

the support of the British. Indeed, Sir B. Fuller made the immoral statement that out of his two wives the Muslim was the favourite! At this time emissaries were sent out preaching a revival of Islam and advocating extreme measures. Riots followed and a reign of terror for the Hindus. It is not unfair to say that the Government created a deadly antagonism between the two communities.

It was also suggested that Muslims should demand separate electorates, and a deputation was bidden to wait on Lord Minto in 1906 to ask for them in the contemplated reforms. The demand for an all-India Muslim organisation, dormant since 1900, was revived, and the Muslim League was founded at Dacca. Its objects were set forth as the promotion of loyalty to the British Government, the protection of Muslim interests, and inter-communal unity. Ramsay Macdonald wrote in his book in 1911 that it was suspected that the Muslim leaders had been inspired by certain Anglo-Indian officials and that discord had been sown by a display of favour to the Muslims. In 1909 separate electorates became part of the Constitution. In 1910 the League appointed the Aga Khan as permanent President, but they began to look for inspiration to the Sultan of Turkey. The British had ceased to be friendly with the Sultan, and he virtually began the Pan-Islam movement as a counter-blast. Muslims were further disappointed by the annulment of the partition of Bengal in 1911 and they were stirred to the depths by the Balkan War. In 1912 the League changed its aim and fixed self-government as an objective, dropping the clause which referred to loyalty. Towards the end of the War (Great War) Muslims joined in the Home Rule agitation and in 1916 the Lucknow Pact was formed between the League and the Congress but only by conceding separate electorates. We have seen in Chapter Three how unity was achieved when Gandhi accepted the Khilafat movement and espoused its cause as

his own. If the serious riots at Arrah had tested the Muslims, the Moplah Rebellion set the same ordeal for the Hindus. After the arrest of the Ali brothers and of Gandhi and the subsequent suspension of civil disobedience, divisions once more developed. Hindus were embittered by stories of forced conversions to Islam, and the *shuddhi* movement, which was started to win converts to Islam and receive them back into Hinduism, equally enraged the Muslims.

Communalism increased between 1922 and 1924. Neither the Unity Conferences nor the Nehru Report (1928) really closed the breach. During the second civil disobedience movement the picketing of the shops of Muslims who had not participated in the movement was resented. But many Muslims joined the Congress and the policy of mass contacts among them which Pandit Nehru encouraged met with a certain success. In the Provincial Elections (1937) the Congress succeeded in winning a number of Muslim seats and in every Congress province there are Muslim Ministers. But this policy has infuriated the Muslim League, which has done all that it could to discredit the ministries and to fan communal conflict. In Cawnpore recently the Muslim Minister, Mr. Ibrahim, was assaulted and there have been numerous riots. At the time of writing the Muslim League leader, Mr. Jinnah, is having conversations with Mr. Gandhi and the Congress President, but the results have not yet been published.

It is worth referring to the opinion expressed to me by one of the leading Congress Muslims and a keen Socialist. In his view, the communal problem, is an inheritance from "feudalism." It is more social and economic than religious. A free India would have produced a strong *bourgeoisie* which might well have swept away the vestiges of feudalism. (This word is perhaps a misnomer in India, for the Hindu social order is not the same as Western feudalism, nor is the part



mercantile, part military-aristocratic order of the Muslims, but we may be allowed to use the phrase in the sense of pre-capitalist.) In Persia "progressive" forces are sweeping away the vestiges of older social orders, and it has been the same in Turkey, and the strength of religion has not prevailed against them. When religion is bound up with a decaying social order it loses its influence as it has done in Turkey and in Russia. In England religious elements allied themselves to the rising *bourgeois* class and religion was elastic enough to reform itself. It is a very moot question whether either Hinduism or Islam are sufficiently elastic to adapt themselves to new conditions, though there are elements in both that might be attracted to Socialism.

In India also there has been the third party. Imperialism inevitably has the effect of retarding the growth of Indian capitalism and in some cases deliberately has perpetuated feudal elements, e.g. the *taluqdars* and the Indian Princes, or, again, the continuance of antiquated institutions of a sectarian type. In the early days of British rule, officials gladly co-operated with reformers. Thus, Ram Mohun Roy co-operated with Lord Bentinck to do away with *suttee*. But later, when it became clear that British rule might be challenged, no friends or potential friends could be alienated. The administration did not dare to antagonise the orthodox. So they declared their neutrality towards all religions. Lala Lajpat Rai wanted the Government to grant 1 crore of rupees for work among the Untouchables; it was refused. Those who were responsible for the Sarda Act (to prevent child marriages) found that the officials were only too often hostile or at any rate indifferent, because it might cause trouble. When the Law was passed it was widely contravened. (The Central Assembly has recently been enacting an Amendment to make it more stringent in application.) Again, it has not been possible to revise Hindu Law in regard

to women's property. These are just a few examples. A foreign government cannot be responsible for drastic social reforms. The result is religious neutrality, and only too often the perpetuation of ancient abuses.

The Congress grew as the expression of the demands of a discontented middle class; as such, it had to play a progressive rôle, but because of the peculiar conditions that rôle was strictly limited. For instance, Gandhi's work for the Untouchables. But the Muslims were dominated by a semi-feudal class. The broad masses of the Muslim population are always potentially revolutionary,<sup>1</sup> agitating about something or other, and their great poverty leads to rapid radicalisation, which finds no adequate leadership among the communalists nor even in the Congress. The Muslims were drawn to Gandhi in 1920 because he seemed objectively revolutionary, just as recently they have been drawn to Jawarhalal Nehru. But, as we have seen, the Congress is still to some extent linked up with the capitalist class and only a small percentage is consciously revolutionary; its energies can easily be absorbed in social reformism of a mild type, but this will not do for the Muslims. They are afraid of the Hindu capitalist, for they have only about 4 per cent. share in the capital investment of the country. (I have not been able to verify or prove this figure.) The vast preponderance of the Muslim community consists of craftsmen and artisans, makers of silk and carpets. Those who have not already been ruined by the competition of Indian and foreign factory goods are in daily dread that they will be soon.

In the towns the Muslims are far poorer than the Hindus. But the vocal elements among the Muslims are either landed gentry or connected with them. Separate electorates have

<sup>1</sup> This statement has been criticised by some friends, but it is the view of one who has worked among the Muslim masses.

been made a party cry to divert attention from wider issues. The core of the Muslim League consists of landlords and others who are afraid of the Congress agrarian legislation, but to-day, because they must have a Muslim following in order to face the Congress—the mass contact development frightened them—they are faced with an inner contradiction. They have had to accept the basis of complete independence and a vague economic programme, but they have eschewed any democratic elections to their higher bodies or the establishment of primary committees. The Muslim League may very well die as the result of its contradictions.

But the Congress has its contradictions too. If the Right should attack the development of mass movements among the peasants and workers it might win the Muslim top layer, parallel to the rather Fascist elements among the Hindus, but, if they push forward with their agrarian programme and the policy of anti-imperialism they will win the masses and defeat communalism. So far my Muslim Socialist, of course, regrets conversations with communal leaders as a retrograde step.

In regard to the question of riots, he went on to say that in most Indian cities there is a considerable "*Lumpenproletariat*"—a floating population of unemployed illiterate and backward elements, merging into the criminal class. This latter—the *goondas*—includes dope-peddlers, inveterate drunkards and procurers. The *goondas* are hooligans, India's equivalent to gunmen. They are akin to the type of people who tended to drift to Oswald Mosley in London and join the ranks of the blackshirts. No political movement has appealed to them or won them. On the other hand, there are the parasitic elements—very vocal—concerned with jobbery. It is worth noting that a great deal of the Hindu-Muslim quarrel is over jobs; it does not touch the masses

at all. These two classes—the *Lumpenproletariat* and the discontented job-hunters—are a fruitful source of tension. Then it must be said, and I say it with a due sense of responsibility, that in some cases the police are corrupt and in touch with the *goondas*. Any little Hindu-Muslim quarrel is carried further and utilised by designing politicians or other unscrupulous persons. Only too often police supervision collapses, because the police have been in the past the instruments of suppression rather than keepers of the peace. Again and again there have been complaints that riots have raged with little being done to stop them till late in the day. It is a bitter fact that we may not shirk that the very forces which have controlled the police are those which have allowed feudalism and social parasitism to continue.

The remarkable thing is that riots do not spread very rapidly. The people are not naturally violent. The increase of political consciousness is having the effect of localising riots. The numbers of those killed or injured decreases. There is far less mass participation in them than in the past.

Recent events in Cawnpore are significant. This is a turbulent city with just those elements of *goondas* and petty unemployed such as we have described. One of the main ways of trying to divert the growing militancy of the Cawnpore workers has been to play on communal differences. It has failed. The Muslim workers have joined the union and have defied all efforts to separate them from their Hindu comrades. Last year a Muslim foreman was murdered and this was used to provoke the Muslims in an alarming fashion, but, thanks to the Left Wing labour leaders, the attempt was foiled, and when, later, these leaders were arrested the City Congress Committee's President—a moderate man and a Gandhist—remarked that the Congress's best friends had been attacked and the city delivered

to the wolves. Critics of the union should remember that it has averted bloody conflicts despite the activities of *agents-provocateurs*. When the trade union leaders were telling the workers to refrain from striking till the Report of the Enquiry Committee was published, persons went round the mills suggesting a general strike and saying that the union was the tool of the Congress Government. Some time ago the communalists tried to make a split by bringing out a Muslim League green flag, but the workers pointed to their red flag and said that the blood which had dyed it red was not communal! But in the present general strike the Muslim League is vying with the Congress in assisting the strikers with food and money.

If communal tension is to be lessened, the Congress will have to mark its steps very carefully. There must be no attempt to dictate in matters of language or culture. Such freedom need not lead to disunity; e.g. in U.S.S.R. there is the fullest freedom of language and culture for the various races which make up the Union. The Congress must do all in its power to disabuse those who think it merely the instrument of Hindu domination.<sup>1</sup> It is unfortunate that in some parts the leading Congressmen are also ardent Arya Samajists. The policy of pushing Hindi as an all-Indian idiom annoys the Muslims. Actually a simple Hindustani can be written in either Urdu or Nagri, and there is a vast deal to be said for the substitution of Roman script. It has many practical advantages; it will cheapen the cost of vernacular textbooks and facilitate the learning of European languages. The Congress President has expressed his sympathy with it, but it is not likely that Indian nationalism is ready to accept it, though it has been adopted in Turkey and parts of China and for new alphabets in U.S.S.R.

<sup>1</sup> The Muslim League professes to find little difference between the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha!

My Muslim friend believed that the communal problem would be solved by class organisations, however much the phrase may frighten.<sup>1</sup> Hindus and Muslims in unions will find more in common than with the class which exploits them. It is worth remembering that the representatives of the Muslims at the Round Table Conference had little or no contact with the Muslim masses and had not been chosen by them. English business interests are encouraging Muslim enterprise. They are behind the Muslim Chamber of Commerce in Bengal, and in that province Europeans get five times the representation that they deserve. These innumerable sectional interests militate against all progressive and modern developments. Imperialism has demanded for its operation a backward country, and thus is bound to hamper or actively to prevent progressive tendencies.

The non-Congress ministries have been forced by pressure from the example of other provinces to embark on a certain degree of ameliorative legislation. Recently the Premier of Bengal has threatened that the Ministry will resign if the Governor refuses to accept certain agrarian legislation on the ground that it will interfere with the permanent settlement, but in these provinces one also finds far less return to civil liberties than in the Congress provinces. In the Punjab Muslims as well as Hindus have been jailed and political prisoners have not been released, and the situation in Bengal has been greatly occupying Mr. Gandhi.

Nehru has been criticised because he has said that politics should be purged of religion, but this must happen. When a Christian remarked recently that he was an Indian first and a Christian afterwards, I do not think that he meant that his religion was a mere adjunct to his national politics,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Introduction, p. 4.

but that he would not allow his religion to separate him from his fellow-Indians.<sup>1</sup> True religion which can make men integrated individuals, above chicanery and free from self-seeking is an asset to politics, but Nehru is right when he says that political religion is reactionary and mediæval. One may refer to the disastrous character or fate of "Christian" or "Catholic" parties in Germany, Italy and Austria.

Nehru also points out that historically Hindus and Muslims have lived at peace with one another and in the villages do so generally still. Communal riots are an urban not a rural phenomenon for the most part. When there has been trouble in the villages it has generally been much more obviously economic. Muslim peasants attack a Hindu moneylender or *vice versa*. The famous Moplah Rising was almost purely economic in character. The failure to achieve a Congress Government in Bengal was to a great extent due to the fact that the Congress was largely middle class in character, or even of the landlord class, and neglected the poor Muslims. But, as Nehru says in *India and the World* (p. 187), "Hindus and Muslims do not form different races; they are essentially the same amalgam of races." Literacy and education will make a vast difference. To-day cow-killing by Muslims and the playing of music outside mosques by Hindus are fruitful causes of trouble. Only a progressive change in social life can liquidate such fanaticism.

The Congress has said that "its primary duty and fundamental policy [is] to protect the religious, linguistic and cultural rights of the minorities in India so as to ensure for them in any scheme of government to which the Congress is party the widest scope for their development and participation

<sup>1</sup> There is all the difference in the world between a Christian Indian and an Indian Christian!

in the fullest measure in the political, economic and cultural life of their country."

There are various other communal conflicts. In the south, the Brahmin *versus* non-Brahmin has been the issue, and in many parts of India the caste *versus* outcaste problem is very real. In Travancore there is virtually a new Hindu-Christian problem.

I referred at the beginning of the chapter to the elasticity of the Hindu social system in its prime. It was able to assimilate foreign tribes and groups, but this elasticity departed from it. Buddhism was to a great extent a social revolution, but it failed and Brahmanism became stronger than ever. The disabilities of the outcastes have been intensified by economic distress. While in old India the *chamars* had a monopoly of the leather tanning and sandal-making trade, to-day they have been ruined by cheap shoes made in factories. It ill behoves the "white" man to make capital of this running sore in Hinduism. What of Jim Crow cars and lynching in America, or the segregation of coloured people in South Africa or the treatment of the Jews in Germany! It is significant that *varna* (caste) means colour, and it represents the demand to preserve the purity of the race on the part of the Aryan invader, though, in fact, it expanded so as to include many non-Aryan elements and became a social rather than a racial phenomenon on a hereditary basis.

I do not feel competent to say whether there is an adequate basis within Hinduism to remove this blot. Gandhi and others are trying to do so. The development of railways and the general breakdown of the Hindu social order have done much to break down caste; it survives rather as a superstition than because it has any social utility.<sup>1</sup> It produced a remarkable civilisation with an extraordinary capacity of accommodation

<sup>1</sup> Cf. at end of Chapter Five for reference to missionaries and the questions of outcastes.



and survival. It has been compared to Plato's ideal in *The Republic*, the Brahmin being the equivalent to the philosopher-king, but one has to ask the question: When was he anything of the kind? In the distant past he was forbidden to have property, and to teach and illuminate. He degenerated into a parasitic class of priests. After the iconoclasm of Buddhism the counter-revolution of the Brahmins led to their increasing tyranny over the lives of the people. Nothing could be done without their being consulted and they dominated the *kshatryas* or rulers.

There are still some who believe that the Hindu system can be rationalised and revived. Some maintain that it was a kind of Socialism. It is true that since the Vedic age there existed all over India guilds of craftsmen and merchants which were autonomous and practically exempt from State interference, and which often united in a league. It is true also that in ancient India there was local government conducted by village assemblies and town assemblies also. We may allow with Dutt that tribal organisations became social corporations strictly outside the sphere of State interference. He gives evidence to suggest that the State in ancient India was only the administrator of existing laws vested in autonomous bodies and carried on by popular tribunals, and that "tribal and clannish organisations of a republican or democratic character persisted vigorously and survived the break-up of Gupta imperialism."<sup>1</sup> There was a very real philosophy of politics in ancient India (cf., for example, the discussion of Kautilya in the *Arthashastra* on monarchy). Successive invasions led to the degeneration of Hindu society.

But having said all this, one must add that if Hinduism became allied to modern capitalism and used the old traditions the result would be an effective form of Fascism. The three-fold strand of birth, tradition and country would make

<sup>1</sup> Cf. pp. 112 and p. 130.

a magnificent *mystique* for Fascism, which demands a rigidly stratified society. Again the idealist trends in Indian speculative thought have influenced such European thinkers as Schopenhauer and Bradley.<sup>1</sup> and Nietzsche; they may be influential if there should be an increase of pessimism and an inability to control a social order in decline.<sup>2</sup> Idealism of this kind has only too often given a metaphysical justification for the perpetuation of injustice and compensated for it by the conviction of the illusory character of the phenomenal world. It profoundly influenced the Jewish gospel of Jesus when it went out into the Græco-Roman world through Neo-Platonism and the Gnostics. Of course, there are other elements in Hinduism, for it is vast and amorphous, but, as Professor Radhakrishnan well puts it:

The general tendency to regard our ancient civilisation as idealistic and the modern one as materialistic is not the expression of revolt, but of reaction. It is a specious rationalisation in defence of our conservatism. There is nothing idealistic about disease or poverty, nothing spiritual in a system that uses beings as beasts of burden. There is nothing materialistic about the application of science to the relief of human distress or the promotion of human happiness. The future seems to be with the youth who revolt against a corrupt social order and a religious fanaticism. Those who are indifferent when the situation is so grave are guilty of cruelty. Injustice thrives on the indifference of the people. The bad employer, the unjust law, the corrupt leader, the false teacher thrive because those who have a sense of justice suffer from inertia. If you have the imagination to visualise the amount of suffering, physical and mental, which a half-clothed and half-starved people stand for, you cannot be indifferent. (From an address to students at Lucknow.)

The *Bhagavadgita*, which is Gandhi's favourite scripture,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Bradley's expression of the basis of moral obligation as "my station and its duties," whereby a social structure determines ethics instead of being subjected to criticism.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. also the ideology of the Fascists Klages and Spann. Also p. 105.

can hardly be regarded as a justification for non-violence.<sup>1</sup> Its background is the Kurukshetra, the Trojan War of India, and the warrior Arjuna shrinks from joining in this internecine conflict between cousins. He is persuaded by the god Krishna in the guise of a charioteer on the basis that he must follow the duty of his caste without considering the fruits. In so far as it is a corrective to the tendency to escapism and quietism which have been inherent in much Indian thought, it is of great value, and can be of value also to those who tend to use religion as an escape from the modern Kurukshetra of our contemporary conflicts, but the emphasis is on caste duty. Mr. Rajagopalacharia has written a beautiful little commentary on what is undeniably one of the most magnificent classics of Indian thought, which may be described as a meditation on selfless service, but the real emphasis is on obedience to the *Dharma* of one's caste. This, again, is something that could be used in the interests of Fascism.

India needs the lesson which Professor John MacMurray has been so insistently dinning into the ears of English Christians that religion can so easily become "pseudo-religion" and purely dualistic in character, ceasing to be in any sense the well-spring of a living social order.

It would be dishonest to underestimate either the strength or the decadence of Hinduism. Brahmins to-day, when they remain loyal to caste restrictions, are generally parasites, avoiding manual labour and living on the gifts of the poor villagers at times of festival or marriage. Religious mendicants still abound; only too often rascals spreading disease. A vast amount of wealth is wasted in unproductive purposes, maintaining temples and shrines; one wonders whether

<sup>1</sup> *Ahimsa* (non-violence) seems to have influenced India through Buddhism, but even more through Jainism. Gandhi comes from a part of India where Jainism is still strong.

the Congress ministries will be able to alienate some of these endowments for their educational schemes. There are magnificent religious figures in Indian religion and it must never be forgotten that Hinduism even to-day has produced the most noble souls—such men as Tagore. Of the reform movements, I have said something elsewhere.

This is not the place to discuss the relation of different faiths or to give any details of Christianity in India. At times it has tended to become communal, though Christians gained considerable prestige by expressing their unwillingness to have separate electorates. At the Round Table Conference the Roman Catholic representative stood for separate electorates, but Dr. S. K. Datta, the other Christian present, vigorously attacked the principle of communal representation and large numbers of Christians have supported him. The Church in India has produced many fine servants of the country, but the large proportion of its members belong to the depressed classes and have taken such culture as they have from the missionaries. This has led to their being somewhat isolated by clothes and customs from their non-Christian brethren. Only too often Christianity has meant missionary patronage and trousers.<sup>1</sup> Christianity at one period had an enormous influence on Indian thought, but, because of its entanglement with the ruling race, its influence was weakened, though this does not mean that the spirit of Christ has ceased to exercise a fascination or an influence upon India. There can be no question that a large proportion of the earlier missionaries in India and many to-day have been conservative and somewhat imperialist in outlook. Christianity in India has been a stimulus towards social reform, but the younger men, now generally Socialistic, suspect it as being part of imperialist penetration and are in

<sup>1</sup> But high caste converts also became Westernised and isolated, partly through the social boycott which they often had to face.

revolt against all religion; above all, the radical youth hate communalism.

A padre recently wrote to the *Church Times* pleading for the Anglo-Indian community. In the course of his letter, he referred to the loyalty of the community, and quoted as an example the case of a railway strike when the Anglo-Indians and Indian Christians refused to participate and thus made it possible for the employers to break the strike. But not all Christians regard "blacklegging" as a virtue, and it could not have endeared the Christians to their fellow-workers. Again, in a speech congratulating the Maharajah of Travancore on the birth of an heir, the Roman Catholic Bishop spoke as follows:

While invoking the blessing of God on the new-born prince . . . I wish to remind you of the vital connection between love of God and loyalty to the King. . . . God is the source of all authority on earth. Every ruler is in his place because God has so ordained. Rulers derive their authority from Him. Those who love God must love the ruler too, who represents Him on earth. The love and respect shown to the ruler goes ultimately to God Himself. Those who defy him are defying God. This is what the Holy Church teaches us. . . . Now, certain revolutionary movements such as atheism and Communism, calculated to destroy the soul of man and society alike, have begun to affect our society also. . . . Atheists are in reality traitors to their king. Without God there would be no authority. . . . Have nothing to do with atheism and atheists and maintain [the] great traditions of piety and loyalty."

This worthy prelate evidently had never read his Aquinas! His doctrine applied in the case of some princes would be somewhat ironical, one feels! The bishops of the Anglican Church were inclined to tell Christians to avoid the civil disobedience movement as Jesus had said, "Render unto Cæsar"—a singularly inept use of a text out of its context!

Again, Indians are well aware of the flux of events in Europe. They witness the denial of Christendom, the blessing

of Franco's armed rebellion by the Spanish hierarchy, the support given by Italian priests to the rape of Abyssinia. Nor does the picture of Western life given in papers and the films incline the Indian to respect the religion of the West. He is not impressed by the excuse of *nominal* Christians. He pays Christianity the compliment of taking it seriously, but, on the whole, the revolutionary elements in Christian history and in the Gospels have been obscured in India. There is little of the apocalyptic fire which recent scholars have seen in the Gospels in the Tolstoyan figure so often presented to India. One distinguished Congressman told me that he and other Hindus felt at home with the New Testament. In some ways I should have felt happier if he had said that he felt ill at ease with it!

It is an old game to play off one another's weaknesses, and we must avoid any tendency to compare Indian superstition to Christian enlightenment. The test is: "By their fruits ye shall know them"; and to-day all religions are being tried in the balance and found wanting. Only that religion will survive which can prove that its life is abiding and that it can produce men who can look a changing world in the face, and who have the inner resources which can enable them to play their part in the building of a new order. It is true that Hinduism has been prone to "tithe mint, anise and cummin" and "to wash the outside of the platter." So have other religions. Hinduism has produced noble souls and insane ecstasies; it is not alone in this. Islam has been excessively fanatical; Christians also have burnt and slain one another. Folk religion can be a very terrible thing and in an out-worn social order religion *must* be iconoclastic, however painful that may be, and even if some good things are lost in the process.

India has prided herself on tolerance, but it has its drawbacks. To-day there is need for a passionate battle

against injustice, and devotion to the cause of the oppressed.<sup>1</sup>

Both Islam and Hinduism contain magnificent things; these should not be lost. They have created art and literature and made a people of infinite variety and great charm. India is drawing out of her treasures things new and old, but what will be decisive will be her attitude to the root question of human personality and the needs of the masses.

Religious groups, like other social isolates, have tended to survive rather on the basis of hate and fear than of love. Professor Berdyaev has pointed out (in his *Destiny of Man*) that religious sects tend to suffer from a conventional falsity and rhetoric. "When a lie acquires the character of a social symbol it is always regarded as good." This is only too true in India, as it is elsewhere. Berdyaev adds that such social lies are to be found not only in religious denominations, but in political parties and scientific and artistic coteries. Group conventions can paralyse the goodwill of individuals and make them blind conformists. What is true of caste is also true of class and race. Socialism dreams and works for a classless society; this is the end of true religion also, but for such a work a great dynamic force is needed to break through the bonds of group as well as individual egoism. It is only such religion that can be of relevance in India to-day. Anything less will merely divide and be scrapped.

<sup>1</sup> There is a passion and thirst for God in India which cannot be denied. Each year the great places of pilgrimage, such as Hardwar or Benares, are filled with ardent pilgrims. But how deep is this passion, and can it be diverted into channels which not only give fulfilment of a spiritual quest, but also are a dynamic for social regeneration? Some of the finest souls I have met in India feel bitterly that religion has destroyed initiative and led to fatalism. Russia was once called "Holy Russia" and produced innumerable pilgrims. Gandhi has tried to harness religion to social reform, but how far he has succeeded one cannot tell. It would be a bold man who would dare prophesy the future of religion in India.

## CONCLUSION

# A LETTER TO AN AVERAGE ENGLISHMAN

DEAR FRIEND,

I am taking it for granted that you have read what I have written with an open mind. I could have made it far harsher without injustice. If you look at even a moderate history like Thompson and Garrett's *Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India*, or delve more deeply into the origins of the British Empire in India, you will find things that make you deeply ashamed.

It is these facts which we so often forget or even have not known which make us seem so hypocritical when we attack Italian aggression or the Japanese invasion of China. It is no good saying that our hands are clean, because they are not and only a fool or knave will try to say so. We took India by sword and trickery; we drained her of wealth. In return we have given her the fruits (sometimes Dead Sea fruits) of modern knowledge. We built railways; they are often designed rather for strategic purposes or for trade than for the comfort of the people and, while the third-class passengers form the great proportion of travellers, I can say with feeling that they are shabbily treated, overcrowded and subjected to petty inconveniences. Of education and the general welfare of the people, I have said enough. There were many among earlier generations of Englishmen in India who grew to love India and her people, and there are still some who desire to heal her wounds, but they are all too few.

I have not laid stress on the sad history of race prejudice and arrogance which have done more to embitter Indians



than all the economic exploitation. They have caused the greatest harm in the psychological sphere. There has been in Indian nationalism an almost pathological element, with the result that it has tended to compensate for a sense of inferiority by rejecting even good gifts from the West. Domination is never a suitable soil for the growth of mutual understanding or intellectual and material co-operation. What may have been a most fruitful union of two traditions has been marred and distorted by imperialist greed and the consequent prejudices.

We still teach our boys to admire the bloody deeds of the *conquistadores* who seized India; we vilify all the Indians who dared resist the spoliation of their territory. I remember reading as a boy a novel called *The Tiger of Mysore*, and, as far as I can recollect, it represented Tippoo Sultan as a monster of cruelty. He certainly gave short shrift to his enemies, but this is how Thompson and Garrett describe him:

Tippoo's memory has been stereotyped into that of a monster pure and simple. But his character was perhaps unique in Oriental history. He had a spirit of innovation and curiosity recalling Akbar's; he was determined to extirpate intoxicants and drugs. . . . Brave himself, he evoked the extreme of reckless loyal co-operation in others. . . . His anxiety to strengthen his country with Western science and achievements was even free from religious hesitations. . . . British officers were astonished by the flourishing condition of Mysore. "The peasantry of his dominions are protected and their labours encouraged and rewarded."

Again, the same authors quote the description of the capture of the city of Seringapatam from a contemporary: "Scarcely a house in the town was left unplundered, and I understand that in camp jewels of the greatest value, bars of gold, etc., have been offered for sale in the bazaars of the army by our soldiers, sepoys and followers. . . . The

property of everyone is gone." Officers were censured for over-appropriation of prize-money. The Governor-General was content with a star and badge made of Tippoo's jewels. "Only Burke reveals a genuine remorse for what ordinary people endured."

I have quoted this at length, because it is one good example of the manner in which we have slandered honourable opponents and obscured the way in which the Empire was won.

The Black Hole of Calcutta has become a proverbial expression, but grave doubt has been thrown on the historicity of Holwell's story, and it is very unlikely that Serajud-dowlah was the villain he has been made out to be. The Calcutta Historical Society has examined the question carefully, and recently Professor Humayun Kabir has also written on the subject. Few people in England know of the "Black Wagon"—the goods-truck which conveyed 200 Moplah prisoners in the hot weather. On arrival only twenty were alive. Innumerable examples could be given also of the economic pillage of India. It has become successively a source of supply for British markets, a market for the disposal of the surplus production of the British factories, a field for the investment of British savings and a means of consolidating the gains of Imperialism and protecting them from the challenges of those who desire changes at home.

Whether it be Englishmen actually serving in India in various posts, business-men, planters or Churchmen, as well as officials, or clerks in City offices or wealthy *rentiers* in Dundee or elsewhere, England has made great profits out of India. It has made the English middle class the strongest in the world and has enabled them to make concessions to the workers and to create a contented labour aristocracy.

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I hope that you have tried to read imaginatively the facts and figures I have given and to clothe them with the starved flesh and anæmic blood which they represent. Try to conceive a proud people of ancient lineage humbled to the dust and perhaps you will understand the feelings which have led to terrorism. The reprisals taken against this admittedly reprehensible form of political activity have to a great extent ruined a whole generation or more in Bengal physically and often mentally.

With the possible exception of China, it is doubtful whether there is anywhere in the world where men and women suffer so much as in India. When we compare the conditions of the workers in England to those in Russia to the disadvantage of the latter, we forget that the Empire includes India. The comparison then will be rather different.

England is full of pacifists who are prepared to go to any lengths rather than to draw the sword in defence of international order, but they acquiesce in the prosperity and security which the possession of the Empire gives them, yet it was gained by force and held by force. Those who rightly protest against the bombing of civilians in Barcelona or in the towns of China should remember that Lord Londonderry confessed after the Disarmament Conference that he had had the greatest difficulty in preserving the use of the bombing aeroplane "*even on the North-West Frontier.*"

The continuance of a backward and enslaved India gives the lie to our ideal of a "Commonwealth of Nations" under the Crown. Even the conceding of self-government will not satisfy India, when her nationals find that their status in other parts of the Empire is steadily deteriorating. How can India desire to remain within the Commonwealth when her citizens are treated as outcastes in South Africa and subjected to all manner of indignities in Fiji or Mauritius? (Cf. C. F. Andrews, *India and the Pacific*, and the

Congress Pamphlet, *Indians Abroad*.) To-day we are shocked at the brutalities of the Fascist Powers, but how far have we set them the pace? Let us cast "the beam out of our own eye"!

Again, when we try to preserve civil liberties and call for them in other countries, it is well to remember the years of repression and the almost complete absence of civil liberties which India has had to endure. Those who have made repression a fine art in India may well be tempted to try Fascist methods at home, if democracy should prove troublesome. It is worth remembering that had the Moors been given freedom it is unlikely that they would have been ready to act as mercenaries for Franco. Who knows whether Gurkhas might not be used one day in England!

The perpetuation of disgraceful conditions of labour in India is a danger to the well-being of the British workers, for a cheap supply of labour attracts those who desire quick returns for their capital and a good deal of capital continues to be invested in India. Those who are agitating in India for better conditions are also safeguarding the standards of living of the workers in Britain. There is a vast amount of material development and unplumbed resources to be exploited, if India is to become a prosperous nation. If we allow India to become a free and contented nation and encourage those who wish to see drastic changes in that land we shall not lose by it, for India will need experts and machinery for some time to come. A happy and contented India progressing towards efficiency and adequate self-defence is a guarantee of peace.

It cannot surely be the will of the British people that we should help to preserve the landlord, usurer, inhuman employer or despotic prince. Nor can we desire to curb the activities of the one great mass party which is genuinely

endeavouring to rebuild India, even if it does not go far enough for our extremists—it is not free to do so at present, even if it would.

The trouble is that we dare to think that the destinies of a sub-continent can be controlled by a small number of Englishmen in Parliament. But how many Englishmen have any clear idea of what India is like? How many have met Indians and discussed problems with them in a comradely way? If Parliament is to be concerned with the affairs of India, which Indians strongly resent, at least one would expect that some Indians would be in Parliament, but, with the exception of Dadabhai Naoroji at one time and another Parsee and the Communist Saklatvala and Lord Sinha, this has not been the case. Though we have had this long and for us profitable connection with India, how many of our school-children are taught to love or respect this wonderful country? I have met very few Englishmen who have not a fantastic conception of India, and on the whole the general ignorance of India in England is as deplorable as it is surprising. It is good to find that to-day the undergraduates of Oxford and Cambridge are increasingly trying to understand India and to meet the Indian students. The days when the men of Trinity cried out "Balliol! Balliol! Bring out your black men!" have gone for ever. But Indians still have difficulty sometimes in obtaining lodgings in London and experience the force of colour prejudice. The large population of Indians in England have little opportunity of meeting the best types of Englishmen, and often live desperately lonely lives.

For reasons which will be manifest to the readers of this book, Indians may often seem suspicious and touchy, but the growth of natural friendship between the two races must be brought about, free on the English side of any trace of condescension or self-consciousness. Indians in England must regard themselves as unofficial ambassadors. Trade union

branches, religious groups, political and other study circles and cultural societies must study Indian affairs seriously and establish contacts with representatives of their particular interest in India.

Above all, there is a real need for the revision of school textbooks and the impartial teaching of Indian history. This is something that the L.C.C. could do, even if the public schools are not ready to take the lead. Again, the establishment of chairs of Indian studies, with first-class Indians occupying them, at our leading universities would be useful. Oxford has already done this. Perhaps the most useful thing would be the starting of a Society for Cultural Relations with India, which, without interfering with such organisations as the India League or the Indian Conciliation Group, would work for a better understanding and appreciation of India in Britain. An art exhibition on the lines of the Chinese and Persian exhibitions at Burlington House would be valuable, and I understand that something of the kind is being considered. The translation of the best vernacular literature would also be valuable. Unless there is a respect for India as a basis, political understanding will not follow.

At the Haripura Congress it was made quite clear that the Indian people have no desire to be involved in an Imperialist War, but that they are ready to co-operate as a free people in the maintenance of peace and international justice. India can read the signs of the times and she believes, rightly or wrongly, that Britain has never been so weak. Indians study the tortuous contradictions of British foreign policy and see in it a symptom of decline. They believe that their liberation is within sight. Can we do the right thing by India? It is a political necessity as well as a moral duty. There is a beginning of new relations with Ireland. What of India?

The present federal scheme satisfies no one, not even the Liberals. Lord Lothian seems to have realised that British

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India can never tolerate federation with the Princes, unless they are prepared to give representative rights to the states people. But even if this be conceded, the scheme is still hedged around with safeguards and gives power to the most reactionary elements, so that the economic transformation of the country cannot ensue. Lord Zetland's statement that there was no justification in the belief that the Viceroy's leave and visit to England would be concerned with any question of change in the Constitution was badly received in India. Indians feel that the innumerable safeguards and reserved subjects are indicative of lack of confidence, and altogether unacceptable. The preamble to the Act will have to be changed and make it quite clear that India's status will be equal to that of the Dominions under the Statute of Westminster.

India must be free to liquidate the symbols of ancient wrongs and strongly urged to do so and to solve the pressing problems of poverty. The result of not doing this will be chaos and violence, which in the present international situation will be disastrous. Britain can never revert to the old method of governing India. Can we break with imperialism and inaugurate a new era of peace, enabling us to deal with the menace of Fascism with a good conscience? Many feel that it is impossible.

The instinct of aggression and the desire for domination is very strong in man. Nations as well as individuals feel this urge for dominion and the thirst for prestige. This is an important factor which is often neglected by those who see in imperialism merely the logical outcome of monopoly capitalism, though, of course, it is that. We cannot condemn Germany, Italy or Japan, for we are also "in the same condemnation." It is significant that those who are ready to buoy up Fascist economies are those who are unwilling to release the strangle-hold on India. The freedom of India is bound up

with the hope of a real world-order and a prerequisite for it.

As Mr. Leonard Barnes remarks (in *Fact* of June, 1937, "The Skeleton of Empire"): you cannot change human nature, some people say, but you can change human behaviour. Raw instincts can be sublimated and the failure to do this will involve the collapse of civilisation. "The commercial, financial, and fiscal policy of the British Empire during the last five years has probably contributed more than any other single influence to set up the conditions that have driven Germany and Italy desperate." The only answer to their demands for colonies is to turn colonies into free communities. One thing is certain, if we are unable to reorganise the Empire as part of an international collective system, world war is inevitable. Those sincere people who want to change the social system must realise that the perpetuation of misery and poverty is intimately bound up with the continuance of Imperialism. English Socialists must learn the lesson of Marx that the workers cannot be free while the coloured workers are in bondage.

It is only the surtax payer who would suffer by the emancipation of India. Only a break with the imperialist tradition can open the way to the increase of consuming power of the Indian masses. If these millions could only spend a few more shillings yearly on British goods it would vastly improve British trade. We have battered on the misery of India and maintained a higher standard of living than the rest of Europe at her expense; the result is high tariffs, the rising cost of living, enormous armaments and the lengthening shadow of war.

Imperial atrocities arise as the result of many indirect forces. We honestly believe that we have done good for India. Only too often we "know not what we do." Perhaps this is what is meant when it is said that the Empire was won in a fit of absent-mindedness. We are caught in a system which



makes us responsible for acts which would horrify us, if ever we were conscious of their effects, but they are obscured for us amidst the flags and bunting. But we cannot escape responsibility; the question still echoes down the ages: "When saw we thee enhungered?"<sup>1</sup> If we accept the fact that imperialism is wrong, this will involve profound changes in the social order.

It is both ironical and tragic that Christianity, which so clearly condemns racial pride and imperial domination, has unconsciously helped to support them; Caiaphas and Pilate are still in alliance, and only too often Christ is crucified afresh in the victims of war and exploitation.

We must try to slough off the assumption of superiority and regard the people of India as comrades in a common struggle for a decent world. When Lord Ripon tried to abolish racial discrimination which refused to permit a European to be judged by an Indian, there was an outcry and Mr. Seton Kerr said in a speech in London: "It outraged the cherished conviction which was shared by every Englishman in India from the highest to the lowest . . . that he belongs to a race which God has destined to govern and subdue." Lord Roberts also remarked that "it is this consciousness of the inherent superiority of the Europeans which has won for us India. However well educated or clever a native may be, and however brave he may have proved himself, I believe that no rank which we can bestow on him would cause him to be considered an equal by the British officer." These sentiments are out-of-date, but how far have they been truly exorcised? It is this spirit which is animating the Nazis to-day. May I add a quotation from a prayer in the Revised Prayer Book of the Church of

<sup>1</sup> "Ignorance is not a simple matter of the absence of knowledge of facts, but it is far more the control of our minds by prejudices and patterns of thinking and feeling which cover up the facts" (Bennet).

England—a prayer for the Empire: “Almighty God, who . . . hast given to our sovereign Lord, King George, a great dominion over all the face of the earth. . . .” It is true that the prayer continues in a more chastened vein and ends with admirable sentiments, but *is imperial power God’s gift?*

Our attitude to India could become the turning-point in world history.

Mr. Bose said in his Presidential Address at the Haripura Congress: “We who are fighting for the political freedom of India are fighting for the economic emancipation of the British people as well.” Elsewhere he gives an interesting analysis of the present position of the Empire: It “at the present moment is suffering from strain at a number of points. Within the Empire in the extreme west is Ireland and in the extreme east, India. In the middle lies Palestine with the adjoining countries of Egypt and Iraq. Outside the Empire there is the pressure exerted by Italy in the Mediterranean and Japan in the Far East, both these countries being militant, aggressive and imperialist. Against this background of unrest, stands Soviet Russia, whose very existence strikes terror into the hearts of the ruling classes in every imperialist state. How long can the British Empire withstand the cumulative effect of this pressure and strain? To-day Britain can hardly call herself ‘Mistress of the Sea.’ . . . Her phenomenal rise in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was the result of her sea-power. Her decline as an Empire in the twentieth will be the outcome of the emergence of a new factor in world history—air force. . . . London lies at the mercy of any bombing squadron from a Continental centre. . . . The clay feet of a gigantic empire now stand exposed as never before.” He says at the end: “We are fighting not for the cause of India alone, but of humanity as well. India freed means humanity saved.”

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May I conclude with the words of George Tyrrell quoted at the end of Thompson and Garrett's history; they are more relevant now than even when they were written:

We cannot expect it [the book] to be anything but unacceptable to those who do not believe in the proximity of a deluge or the necessity of an ark. We address ourselves, therefore, to those who believe in both for the simple reason that they are already afloat.

FINIS

